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THE GIRL HE MARRIED.

CHAPTER I.

BY THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

THUS ran the brief but startling telegram which was delivered late in the evening :—

"*Dr. Feverley, Blairavon, to Lennard Blair,*
Liverpool.

"*Come home by the first train. A crisis is at hand. Your father cannot survive much longer.*"

From Liverpool to Blairavon, in Scotland, is more than one hundred and sixty miles by rail, the only mode of conveyance now, and poor Lennard Blair thought nervously of his chances of being at home in time to see—before the fatal moment—that parent to whom he was so tenderly attached; and in a rapid and bewildered manner, acting as one might do in a dream, he thrust a few necessary articles into a carpet bag, preparatory to starting by the night express train for Carlisle and the North.

He glanced at his watch; he had already lost two hours, during which the telegram had been waiting for him, while he had kept several business engagements between the counting-house and the Huskisson Dock. In those two hours what might he not have lost! and from amid the bustle of Liverpool, and the roar of its busy streets, his memory flashed home to his father's secluded mansion in Lothian.

To Mr. Abel Envoyse, the managing clerk or cashier of Messrs. Vere, Cheatwood, & Co.—a meek-looking little gentleman with a bald head, who had been in the house for

years upon years, who had never set up for himself, and never hoped to do so, whose ambition was probably satisfied by the salary now given him, and who thought Vere & Cheatwood the greatest firm in the world, even as Liverpool was the centre of the universe—to Mr. Envoyse, we say, Lennard Blair intimated the pressing nature of the telegram he had received, and that he must start at once for Scotland.

Though a clerk in the establishment, and one who had to work hard at his desk, Blair had a few thousands invested with the firm, and ranked as a junior-partner therein, but his name did not appear as such, so Mr. Envoyse felt himself compelled to consent, in absence of Mr. Vere, for Cheatwood and the Co. had long been myths.

"You will complete those bills of lading for Leonardo & Co., of Vera Cruz," said Blair, with nervous haste, "and I shall see Mr. Vere about other matters, when I reach Scotland; he is there before me. Meantime, I require, please, a hundred pounds in gold."

"Gold?" echoed Envoyse, rubbing his bald head.

"Of course; English notes are useless in Scotland."

"Past bank hours. Do you want the money now?"

"This instant."

The sum was large for one in Blair's position.

"We never keep much in the house when Mr. Vere is away," said the old cashier, reluctantly unlocking one of Milner's great patent safes; "but here you are, Mr. Blair."

"Thanks," and even in his haste, so strong was the force of business habit, Lennard counted over the money, and gave a receipt, while muttering in a broken voice, "I am telegraphed for, because my poor father is—is dying."

"Good bye, Blair," said some of the clerks, with all of whom he was an especial favourite.

"Wish I was going with you," added one, who was an idler, and usually wished himself anywhere but at his desk.

"But not on such an errand, surely," said Blair, as he thrust several dockets of papers into his drawer, and locked it.

"Oh, no, my dear fellow, I didn't mean that," replied the young man, colouring, as he bent over his ledger, on which the gas-jet cast a glare from under its conical green shade.

The counting-house of Vere, Cheatwood, & Co., was then in an alley off Canning Place, and in the immediate vicinity of the Revenue Buildings, the Custom House, and Post Office, admirably situated for business, and in the most bustling part of the quays.

Lennard Blair sprang into a passing cab, and "tipped" the driver.

"To where, sir?" asked the man.

"Terminus—Great Howard Street—go like lightning, my good fellow!" and the short distance between Canning Place and the station of the Lancashire line was soon traversed, yet scarcely quick enough for the impatience of Lennard Blair.

The first bell had already been rung; the carriage-doors were being slammed to; the last of the luggage was being tossed into the guard's van, or hoisted on the roofs, and pointsmen and porters were running hither and thither, as Lennard hurried along the crowded platform, looking for a seat.

He had not been without hope of getting a carriage, or rather a compartment thereof, to himself, that he might indulge in his own melancholy reflections, undisturbed by the presence of strangers, the thoughtless, perhaps, and the noisy; but the first glance he gave along the train dissipated the expectation; the carriages seemed crowded—every seat apparently was engaged.

Though far from being a sordid character, Lennard Blair had been more used latterly to travel by second, and even third class, than first; and now, when paying for the latter, he had certainly no desire to endure the useless discomforts of either of the former. The guard saw that he was carrying his own bag, and so left him to shift for himself.

In the centre compartment of a first-class carriage sat a young man, with long, fair moustaches. He was alone, and dressed in a fashionable travelling suit, with an eye-glass screwed into the rim of his white half-bullet hat, and through this optical medium he was leisurely surveying the bustle on the platform, and about the departing train.

Thrice had Lennard attempted to open the door, but found it locked, for the person in possession of the entire compartment had doubtless a private key.

"Engaged here," said he briefly, yet Lennard saw that he was alone, the five other seats being vacant.

"Are you quite sure, sir?" asked Lennard anxiously.

"Quite—all engaged here."

"Awkward, excessively. I have looked everywhere else for a seat."

"Ah! then you may do yourself the pleasure of looking again; there is just time," was the chaffing response, as the other drew up the window-glass to cut the matter short. He then unfolded *Punch* and the *Times*—placed his hat-box on one cushion, his carpet-bag on another, some rugs on a third, his umbrella on a fourth, his feet on a fifth, and him-

self personally on a sixth, proceeding thus, like a free-born Briton, to occupy as much of the premises as he could, to the exclusion of others.

Not a vacancy was to be seen elsewhere. The up-train from the north was panting and puffing outside, its red lights glaring in crimson along the line; the guard was swinging his lantern, and shouting "Tickets! have your tickets ready," near the last carriages of the train.

"Guard," said Lennard, slipping a couple of florins deftly into that official's back-turned hand; "get me a seat, please, anywhere!"

"Which class, sir?"

"First."

"Plenty of room, sir, in the centre compartment of the third carriage; five seats unoccupied; look alive, sir, please."

He of the eyeglass and long moustaches, who had been watching Lennard's anxiety with some amusement to himself, had again lowered the window, as the gas-lighted station was close and dense in atmosphere, and the night—one of the last in April—being warm and without a breath of wind. Moreover, the supervisor of the tickets had thrown open the door now.

"Sir," said Lennard, emphatically, when he saw that in addition to other lumber, books and papers now strewed all the cushions, "are those seats really engaged?"

"Don't you see that they are?" drawled the other.

"Now, this one, for instance?" urged Blair.

"By whom?" added the guard.

"Can't tell—by *Punch*, and my hat-box, I suppose."

"Lennard seized the articles indicated, and tossing them far out on the platform took possession of the seat, and throwing some of the rugs, &c., from the opposite one underfoot, proceeded to make himself at home.

With an angry oath, he of the eyeglass, who little anticipated so summary a proceeding, sprung out to recover his property, and had barely regained his seat, being roughly shoved in by the guard, when the bell rang, the shrill whistle cleft the air under the lofty iron roof of the station, out of which the train glided away between Great Howard Street and the Leeds canal, while Lennard Blair and his fellow-traveller, by the light of the carriage-lamp, eyed each other with glances the reverse of friendly.

"If we are to travel together, considering your insolent disposition, you will be none the worse for being snubbed, my fine fellow," thought Lennard.

"Curse him; some post quill-driver, or bumptious snob,

out on the loose, I suppose," muttered the other, almost audibly, while stroking his moustaches with an angry and supercilious air.

"Did you think, sir, to occupy the whole carriage?" asked Lennard, whose cheek glowed with an emotion of indignation, which certainly served to repress his sorrow and anxiety.

"The whole carriage—well, perhaps so!"

"And may I ask why?"

"Because in this world every man has a right to get as much as he can for his money, and I always take deuced good care to look after Number One," he replied, coolly.

He then began to whistle a low but popular street melody, while Blair busied himself with his "Bradshaw," that volume obscure apparently as the shastres of Brahma, inextricable as the hieroglyphics of Memphis; and through all the mazes of Parliamentary and express trains, of first, second, and third classes, the charges for cattle and luggage, &c., he sought to reckon over the anxious hours that must inevitably intervene before he reached Blairavon in Western Lothian.

This young man in his four and twentieth year, wearing the grey Tweed suit and smart wide-awake hat, pray observe him well, friend reader, for he is the hero of our story.

His hair is a rich curly brown; his eyes are neither brown nor grey, yet there are times and lights in which they seem both; with clean-cut features, he is closely shaven, all save a thick moustache; he has a straight nose and handsome mouth. His figure is strong and lithe, every muscle being developed, as with bat and oar and rifle he has kept his place among the best in England, and is moreover the champion shot of the Liverpool Volunteers.

Blair's voice is very pleasant, and musical too; there is a singular chord in it, that wins every ear, and seems to speak of a gentle and tender nature, though there are times when he can be bold and stern, but always a manly young man.

Swiftly sped the night express train.

Liverpool, with its mighty world of wealth and work, its wilderness of docks and forests of masts, the broad waters of the Mersey, on whose bosom uncounted lights were shining from ship and shore, from wharf and sea-wall,—all were left behind. The dark masses of the Industrial School and Kirkdale Jail on one hand, the scattered village of Bootle on the other, were soon glided past; houses became more scarce and far between, and after emerging from the long and rumbling tunnel, the train was careering through the open country under the clear and lovely light of an April

moon, while Ormskirk with its market-place and coalpits, Farrington and its moss, soon vanished in the distance.

Once or twice Lennard Blair, who had much to think of and to reflect on, turned his eyes from the swiftly passing scenery without to the face of his fellow-traveller, who evidently was neither inclined to converse or make himself agreeable; for barely had the train emerged from the tunnel beyond Bootle Lane when he produced an embossed silver case of great size, and selecting therefrom a cigar (a rat's-tail with a straw through it), he lit it with a flaming vesta and proceeded to smoke without the ceremony of an apology offered or permission given, and without the usual courtesy of offering one to his companion.

This man's features were striking, but unpleasing; his complexion was fair, almost to unhealthy paleness; he wore that species of beard denominated a goatee, and seemed ten years or so older than Lennard, to whom his whole bearing was eminently offensive, displaying a cool insolence which, if he dared, might verge on open ruffianism; yet his travelling suit, his Albert chain, rings, scarf, and gloves, etc., were all in the most unexceptionable taste.

It is seldom that people take much interest in their fellow-travellers, even though they are to journey all night with them; but now Lennard Blair felt—how or why he knew it not—an intense and intuitive antipathy for this person. There was a strange expression in his pale green eyes which (rather than their form or colour) made Blair recoil instinctively from him; and they had a stealthy and peculiar mode of looking away when those of another met them; yet Lennard felt certain that whenever he affected to sleep or look from the window the gaze of his companion was fixed keenly upon him.

With this emotion of repulsion there floated through Blair's mind some of the many stories he had heard or read of attacks, outrages, snares laid, and even murders committed in railway carriages; but he almost smiled as he felt his own biceps, for he knew himself equal to tossing the stranger out of the window if the occasion required him to do so.

Little could Lennard Blair foresee how much, in a future time, his fate was to be influenced by this cool and impudent fellow who sat smoking in front of him, and superciliously pulling the windows up or down, as suited his own fancy or convenience. Lennard's intuitive dislike at last became so strong, that while surmising whether this personage was one of the swell-mob, he asked:

"Are you going far this way, sir—along the line I mean?"

"Rather too far, perhaps," was the dry response.

"How?"

"Into Scotland," he replied with a thick and unpleasant voice, as if his tongue were too large for his mouth.

"Too far, you think?"

"To West Lothian, if you know such a place; I never heard of it before. But here is Preston already. By Jove! we have come at a ripping pace!" he added, as the train swept with a hollow roar into that bustling and bewildering station, where so many lines meet and intersect; and then ensued the usual banging of doors, the clinking of the hammers on the wheels to test their soundness, the shouting of newsboys, the swaying of lanterns, and hurrying to and fro of porters, platform officials, and sharp-eyed pointsmen.

"Do we change here?" asked Blair anxiously, snatching up his bag to be ready for the answer.

"Of course we do—change for the Black Sea, Calcutta, and the Baltic," drawled the other, perpetrating an old joke, which was meant as impertinence, while he lay back in his seat and watched the smoke of his cigar rising in concentric curls up through the ventilator in the carriage-roof.

"Tickets!" shouted the guard, while a weather-beaten and well-whiskered face appeared at the window, thus arresting a threatening gesture made by Lennard's hand towards his companion's nose.

The smoker now made studiously a delay, to worry and annoy the official, by slowly searching every pocket in succession, as well as his pocket-book, cigar- and card-cases.

"Smokin' is agin the company's rules—a fineable offence; and you should have your ticket ready, sir," said the official.

"Should I really?" drawled the other; "do you want it?"

"No."

"Then why do you bother about it?"

"Because it must be shown and checked," replied the guard, becoming furious, but restraining his passion, as he flashed his bull's-eye full into the traveller's face. "Look sharp, please, or——"

"Or what?"

"I shall call a policeman."

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear fellow; if the pasteboard is worth seeing, it is worth waiting for," replied the other, who, after trying the man's patience to its utmost limits, showed his ticket at last, expressing a hope that a sight thereof "would calm his ruffled feelings and soothe his troubled bosom."

With an imprecation, the official checked the ticket, slammed to the door, and the laugh of the impudent traveller was lost amid the clatter of the train as it steamed out of the station towards Lancaster.

Full of disgust for such a companion, yet wondering who he might be that was going exactly to the same part of Scotland as himself (T. C. appeared in large white letters on his portmanteau), Lennard Blair lay back in a corner of the carriage, and with half-closed eyes communed with his own heart, thinking of the sorrows that awaited him, of the past that had gone for ever, and the anxieties that might cloud his future.

CHAPTER II.

HOMEWARD ON THE NORTH-WESTERN LINE.

On sped the swift night express by the great North-Western line, its monotonous hum and motion being conducive either to drowsiness or reflection; thus Blair, though he closed his eyes as if to sleep, permitted his mind to become a prey to anxious and exciting reverie.

"In the morning of our days," says the eloquent Burke, "when the senses are unworn and tender, when the whole man is awake in every part, and the gloss of novelty fresh upon the objects around us, how lively at that time are our sensations, yet how erroneous are the notions which we form of things!"

Lennard Blair was still in the morning of his days, yet in some respects he had lived long enough to see many errors and had won much experience.

He was going back on a sorrowful errand to the narrow world—the little rural circle from which he had emerged some five or six years before: and as the homeward train sped on, faster than the engine, yea, faster even than the electric telegraph, the posts of which seemed to be flying past in pursuit of each other, did his thoughts flash back to earlier years—the past returned to memory, and the present fled.

The only surviving son of Richard Blair of Blairavon, he had come into the world with the fairest prospects of succeeding, if life was spared him, to an ample, even noble inheritance, which his father contrived, with the utmost assiduity, to squander on the turf and elsewhere, till the whole of his property, save the remnant named Oakwoodlee on which he resided, had, by mortgage, purchase, and otherwise,

passed into the hands of Mr. Vere, the wealthy Liverpool merchant.

"Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits," to quote the "Two Gentlemen of Verona." Lennard soon learned the truth of this, and resolved to seek his fortune—or, as his father phrased it, in a moment of bitterness, "to earn his bread"—elsewhere, having become early aware that nothing was to be won by a life of dependence on his father's shrivelled purse; and it was not probable the blind goddess would seek him out on the pastoral braes of Blairavon.

He had accepted Mr. Vere's apparently kind offer of a desk in his counting-house, and invested in the firm a moderate sum that had accrued to him from his mother, the heiress of a few hundred acres; and thus he had gone south to Liverpool, among its busy thousands, to labour and to learn, to work, to wait, to make a way in the world, and to regain, if possible, the position and wealth of which his father's extravagance and imprudence had deprived him; for Lennard treasured in secret all that pride of name and family which is inherent in the Scottish character, and he shrunk nervously from the conviction that, unless he thus strove, with resolution and thrift, the old Blairs of Blairavon would go down into the common herd (from whence they had sprung centuries ago), and be heard of no more.

Romances which Lennard had read in boyhood, and the prophetic wishes or hopeful prophecies of his old nurse, Elsie Graham, and of his father's attendant, Stephen Hislop, once butler at Blairavon, now valet, groom, and general factotum in the little household at Oakwoodlee, had all conduced to strengthen these honourable fantasies—this earnest, but perhaps desperate ambition, in the young man's heart.

On the Blairavon lands is a grey old Druidical monolith named the Charter Stone. It was a firm belief in the family and county, and had been so for ages, that so long as a Blair retained a right of proprietary in this unsightly block, the race would prosper. Thus a thousand times had the impoverished old gentleman reminded Lennard, with glee, that though "the wealthy *parvenu*, Mr. John Vere," had won the lands of Blairavon "by his sordid and drudging industry," the Charter Stone was on the remnant they still retained near Oakwoodlee.

His father, though he heartily despised all manner of business, and was totally ignorant of it, save in the items that related to bills, kites, and I O U's, had, after gulping down his old family pride, fostered the wish of his son to the utmost. Hence, to buy back the old patrimony, or to

create another; to toil, and spin, and work; to emigrate and dig, but only to return and regain the old place that had gone out of the original line, was the object of Lennard Blair, as it has been the Golden Dream, the romantic hope (in *no* instance, perhaps, ever realised), of many a Scottish wanderer in the woods of America, in the Australian bush, the mines of California, and the diggings of Ballarat: but this was the secret impulse which animated Lennard as he drudged at his desk amid the roar of busy Liverpool.

During the first few years he had been in business he had learned much, but had not clambered far up the social ladder. He was literally only a clerk in the great mercantile firm of Vere and Cheatwood, with a small share in the profits derived from the money he had invested in the stock, by the advice of Mr. Vere, whose acquaintance and patronage he had acquired when that gentleman purchased his father's estate.

With all these sanguine hopes and delusive desires, the combined result perhaps of early education and secret vanity, there existed in the mind of Lennard no emotion of upbraiding or reproach against his father. The poor old man was dying now; his weakness and his errors were things of the past to be forgotten; his virtues alone were to be remembered; and the last time Lennard had seen his wistful, kind, and saddened face, when he left home to push again on his worldly way, came vividly to memory now.

To add to Lennard's troubles, he was in love—in love with Hesbia Vere, his employer's only daughter; a young lady ere long to be introduced to the reader.

As a neighbour when at Oakwoodlee, and as one of the best round dancers and most pleasant friends whom she met at home, Hesbia Vere had always preferred, or seemed to prefer, Lennard Blair to many other young men whose wealth or worldly position were infinitely greater than his. On whose arm could she droop or lean more pleasantly and freely when breathless, flushed, and palpitating after a long waltz or a furious galop; and who so readily found her fan, or bouquet, and so gracefully and deftly cloaked or shawled her for the carriage?

He had brought her beautiful flowers and the rarest exotics: ferns, the most remarkable; a wonderful parrot from a West India ship in the Albert Dock—a parrot that swore most fluently, but luckily in Spanish.

He lost bets of gloves to her so adroitly; selected her books and pointed out passages which, when underlined by pencil, told *so* much more than he would have dared to say;

they had exchanged innumerable *cartes-de-visite*, and he had sketched and written in her album more than perhaps Papa Vere would have quite approved; but that was a species of book he never by any chance opened.

They frequently met by the most singular chances in quiet and shady corners of the Botanical Gardens, or when she was riding in the Prince's Park and other promenades. Lennard Blair, in virtue of the sum invested in the funds of Vere and Cheatwood, rather than in consequence of his gentlemanly bearing and good birth, was every way Hesbia's privileged dangler, greatly to the envy of his fellow-clerks, and to the annoyance of several admirers of more pretensions.

He had made love to her in every way that man could do, short of actually declaring it, and in such a way the flirt—for notoriously was Hesbia Vere a flirt—received it.

All this alluring intercourse with the bright and beautiful girl had made more impression on *his* heart than it left on hers; for Hesbia became his sun, his centre, his pole-star; yet he was merely one among many privileged admirers who hovered about her, especially when he was elsewhere; and it was only a realization of what the old rhyme tells us of the moon that looked on many brooks. So, as Lennard thought of her in his reverie, he whispered to himself,—

"Oh what can ever come of such a passion as mine? In love—in love with one of the greatest flirts in Liverpool? A girl who is vain as she is beautiful, and fickle as she is vain. What folly or magic is it that lures me to become her shadow, when I know that she has jilted and trifled with wealthier, wiser, and better-looking fellows than I? Even her cousin Cheatwood has failed with her, if I have heard aright; and I am to see her again, for she is at Blairavon with her father. She, at Blairavon!"

So pondered Lennard amid his waking dreams in the night as the train glided on, now through deep cuttings, and then along grassy embankments, where the telegraph wires sung in the wind like Æolian harps; past darkened or half-lighted stations, where the offices were closed, the book-stalls shut, and the platforms deserted; the flaming posters and huge placards on the walls alone remaining to indicate that on the morrow's dawn the stream of life would flow again.

On past red-gleaming furnaces and dark pit-mouths, the clanking engines and whirling wheels, the smoking chimneys and murky atmosphere of the Black Country, where night and day, underground and above it, the brawny gangs of grimy men are for ever, ever toiling; on through the

gloom and uncertainties of the scenery, as the moon waned, and white lights and green, or the crimson danger signal, flashed out of the obscurity; past green paddocks, shining pools, and thick hedgerows; past villages buried in sleep; past tall ghostly poplars, and those pollard willows and oaks, the eccentric trimming of which is peculiar to England; past huge manufactories and coal and iron mines, with cones of flame that reddened earth and sky.

And so on flew the train by stately Lancaster, where the stars shone brightly in the depths of the Lune, and on by the picturesque vale of Kendal embosomed among beautiful hills; on by the grassy fells of Westmoreland and the old castle of Penrith, whilom built by Richard of England as a barrier against the Scots—an open and gaping ruin now—and thence onward by Carlisle; and the breaking dawn saw the express train careering through the green and pastoral glens of the Southern Highlands, while the early mists were rising in light grey masses from the grassy summits of the Hartfell, the highest of the Scottish mountains south of Forth and Clyde.

With the aid of his private key Lennard's companion had got out for refreshments—"nips and pick-me-ups," as he styled them—at every station where the train stopped. Blair had no desire to accompany him, but sat wakeful and apparently listless in a corner, full of his own thoughts, which increased in keenness and intensity as he found himself among the mountains and nearing home.

But he deemed it a singular coincidence that, though he changed carriages twice, and twice even to different trains and lines, his unpleasant fellow-traveller was constantly his *vis-à-vis*, and made exactly the same changes at the same times and places.

Influenced probably by the numerous brandies-and-water he had imbibed, this personage now condescended to make some inquiries about the localities they passed through; but as the replies were always followed by sneers, in which he seemed prone to indulge, or by pitiful jests and disparaging reflections on the country, the people and the features, or names of the scenery, Lennard Blair became irritated by his rudeness, and relapsed into studied silence.

Once he offered the use of his brandy flask to the stranger, by whom it was coldly and curtly declined, and after this he proceeded to use his *own*.

It was now that sweet season, the end of spring, the last few days of April, when the buds have burst in all their freshest greenery in the gardens and woodlands; when the

daffodil, the yellow crocus, and the primrose peep up from under the sprouting hedgerow; when the young lambs are basking on the sunniest slopes of the hills, and the swallows are returning from their mysterious flight; when rivulets and cascades are all swollen by the spring showers, and rush down towards the glens with increased force and volume; when "fresh flowers and leaves come to deck the dead season's bier," and a spirit of youth and new life seem in everything.

> "Through wood and stream, hill, field, and ocean,
> A quickening life from the earth's heart has burst,
> As it has ever done."

And nowhere is spring more lovely than in our southern Highlands, and on the pastoral braes of Annandale.

Now Lennard Blair was drawing nearer and nearer to his home, especially after he had passed the meadows, the woody haughs, and morasses of Slamanan, an old Celtic name which signifies "The Back of the World."

Last night amid the roar, the lights, the multitudes of Liverpool; this morning in a solitude where the shrill whistle of the curlew, or the lowing of the cattle, as they were startled by the passing train, alone woke the silence!

But this was home, and with eager eyes did Lennard scan the old familiar haunts and features. Every sight and sound woke boyish memories in his saddened heart; the chaunting or whistling of the rustics, as they rode their giant horses afield; the black gleds wheeling in the sunshine from the ruins of Torphichen—that church and fortress where the Lords of St. John of Jerusalem lie cross-legged in their graves, with shield on arm and sword at side; the mountain burn that gurgled under the green whins, bearing the last year's withered rushes to the Avon (the dark and winding river), the old church tower in the distance, and all its sheltering groves of beech and chestnut.

In yonder burn-brae had he, aided by old Steinie Hislop, unearthed and killed his first otter; from that pool he had landed his first salmon, and there, amid the black boulders that lay in mid stream and chafed the waters into white froth, he had filled many a basket with speckled trout in the happy times of boyhood that could return no more.

On yet, and in the distance he could see on the green slope of a hill a great grey monolith upreared in its loneliness amid the pastoral solitude, and then he felt his pulses quicken,

It was the Charter Stone of Blairavon, and it stood, as he knew, but a few furlongs from the house of Oakwoodlee, where his old father lay on his death-bed.

In the middle distance was a stern group of aged Scottish pines—the last remnants of an old forest, coeval with the Torwood, where once had roamed the snow-white bulls and ferocious bears of Caledonia—the stems of the gnarled trees standing out redly from the feathery masses of bright green fern, while the crags of Dalmahoy and the hill of Logan-house, the highest of the beautiful Pentland-range, little less than a mile in height, rose against the clear blue sky beyond.

The next station was three miles further on than Oakwoodlee, but the latter was still in sight when the shrill whistle of the train cleft the morning welkin. The speed became slower, and tickets were searched for, and bags, umbrellas, and hat-boxes were clutched by the passengers in their haste for release from their temporary imprisonment.

A handsome tilbury, a bang-up affair, with patent drag, plated axles, and a high-stepping horse, with splendid harness, was waiting the arrival of Lennard's companion. The groom was in the Vere livery, and the Vere crest appeared upon his buttons, the harness, and ostentatiously on more parts of the vehicle than one.

With much fuss and obsequiousness, the groom collected the portmanteaux, rugs, plaids, rods, and gun-case of the traveller, and had a couple of pointer "dawgs," as that personage called them, brought from the guard's van.

"How far is it from here to Blairavon?" he inquired.

"About three miles, sir," replied the servant, touching his hat; "you'll be there in time for breakfast."

"The old boy at Oakwoodlee is awfully cut up, I hear."

"If you mean Mr. Blair of Blairavon——"

"No—you seem jolly verdant for a Scotsman—he that was."

"Oh, sir! folks say he is dying."

"Poor old fogey; and so his lands have gone to those servants elect of mammon, those worshippers of the golden calf, whom he despised so much."

"They have gone to master, sir," said the puzzled groom, touching his hat again.

"Exactly; jump up, all right," replied the other, assuming the reins and whip, and without a farewell nod or recognition, he drove off, leaving Lennard Blair, who looked somewhat earnestly after him, perplexed and stung by the

remarks he had overheard, to trudge afoot with his bag and rugs, as at that solitary little station there were no vehicles to be had for hire.

CHAPTER III.

OAKWOODLEE.

THE mansion of Oakwoodlee, in which Lennard's father had resided since the loss of Blairavon, had been originally the jointure-house of the entire estate, and was first built for an ancestress, Griselda Blair, of the Tor hill, whose husband fell at the battle of Dunblane, in 1715, with the white cockade in his bonnet, and a colonel's commission from King James VIII. in his pocket.

It is a plain, small, two storeyed house, with great chimney-stalks, crowstepped gables, and scroll-formed corbels at the corners. The walls are massive; in front are nine windows, set deep into the masonry and whilom grated with iron in former times of trouble. A coat of the Blair arms—the star of eight points, and so forth—is carved above the door, to which a flight of broad stone steps gives access, and which is furnished with a great bell in addition to a ponderous old-fashioned knocker.

In the south-western gable is built an ancient dialstone; the front of the mansion faces the south, on the green slope of a hill surrounded by old copsewood, the shootings of which were always let to add to the shattered income of old Richard Blair.

Before the door is yet standing the identical "loupin-on stane," with its three time-worn steps, by the aid of which Lady Griselda, of Blairavon, was wont to mount behind her butler on a pillion, when they rode together on one horse weekly to the church of Inchmachan.

At the door he was warmly, even affectionately, received by the two faithful adherents of their fallen fortunes, who had been watching his approach. Old Elsie Graham—once his nurse in youth, and now his father's in old age—a hard-featured, but kindly, old motherly woman, who met him with a scared and anxious face; lips that were white and eyes inflamed by recent tears and long watching.

"Welcome back, laddie! welcome hame! but oh, Mr. Lennard, what a sorrowfu' hamecoming is this for you," she exclaimed, covering her face with her faded black-silk apron.

"Oh, sirs! oh, sirs! what is this that has come upon us a' at last!"

"Hush, woman, will you?" said old Steinie Hislop, sharply interrupting her noisy but half-stifled grief; "dinna add to his distresses by your din and nonsense. But I say wi' Elsie, welcome to you, Mr. Lennard, though it be in an evil hour," added the old man as he shook Lennard's hand, and then respectfully hastened to relieve him of his bag, railway rugs, and cane.

"And my father, Steinie," asked Lennard, with a quivering lip, "how is he?"

"More composed now—more resigned to the great change that is at hand—than when Dr. Feverly telegraphed for you last night."

Lennard sighed bitterly.

"He is asleep, so dinna disturb him," added Steinie; "and while you are getting some refreshment the doctor will join you."

"Then Dr. Feverley is here?"

"Yes, Mr. Lennard; but asleep on the dining-room sofa. All night was he awake, and most attentive," said Elsie. "But step your way ben to the breakfast-parlour; fu' well ye must ken the gate, my braw bairn."

"Is it likely I should ever forget it, Nursie?" asked Lennard, with a kind, sad smile, as he entered the old familiar room, the windows of which faced the ancient grove of Scottish pines that cast their shadows, as they had done for ages, on the charter stone, while both Elsie and Stephen Hislop hovered restlessly about him intent on kindness and commiseration; for they had loved the lad from his infancy, and since their own youth had been in the service of his family.

Old Stephen, who had latterly been groom of the venerable Galloway cob (which represented what was once a noble stud); gardener of the little plot where a few edibles were grown; valet, butler, and, as already stated, factotum—still wore a kind of shabby livery coat, with a striped-blue and yellow vest, long and flapped, with drab breeches and gaiters; a kind of hybrid costume between groom and footman. He was a thin, spare man in his seventieth year, round-shouldered; with clear, keen, anxious, grey eyes; thin white hair, and hollow and wrinkled face.

At a glance, Lennard took in the whole details of the room and of its furniture; the full length of his father—a handsome man in hunting costume, with his favourite horse—by Sir J. W. Gordon, was an imposing picture; but

the other appurtenances were relics of the "plenishing" procured for his grandmother in the days when George III. was king, and they seemed odd, quaint, and most unmistakably shabby when contrasted with much that he had been accustomed to of late. Yet all were familiar as old friends: the square-elbowed horse-hair sofa, with black squabs and pillows; the circular stand for curious old china; the corner cupboard, with its green dram-bottle, and worm-stemmed glasses, the teapot of old Dame Griselda Blair, and the punchbowl from which her husband had drunk many a fervent toast to "the king ow're the water;" then there was the queer old chiffonier or bookcase, with its faded volumes of Fielding and Smollett; the dumb waiter; the mirror above the mantelpiece with its painted border, and the old flyblown engravings of the death of Nelson and of Abercrombie, in black and gilded frames.

He was more intent on these objects which spoke so much to him of home and old home memories than on the viands prepared for him by Elsie and Steinie, who bustled about the table, and urged him to sit down and breakfast after his long journey by rail overnight.

"Bodily wants *will* make themselves felt, ye ken, Mr. Lennard," said Elsie, as she poured out his coffee with one hand and patted his thick brown hair with the other.

In vain he pled that he could not eat, for grief and the rush of thought were choking him.

"But folk can aye drink, however deep their grief," she replied, placing the cup before him, with such cream that the spoon might stand in it, fresh eggs and butter, salmon steaks and braxy ham, such as he had never seen since he mounted his desk in the house of Vere, Cheatwood & Co.

"We couldna' get you a bit of game, even if it were the season, Mr. Lennard," grumbled Steinie; "for in the fields where the partridges used to be thicker than the turnips, and on yon burn-brae where the grouse and ptarmigan blackened the very heather, Mr. Vere, or rather his sporting friends, with twenty guns and mair, breechloaders too, has made a clean sweep o' everything."

"Never mind the birds or the breakfast," said Lennard, impatiently; "but tell me of my father's ailment. What does the doctor call it?"

"A gradual sinking of the whole system," replied Elsie, who, like Steinie, spoke English, but with a strong Scotch accent, and only an occasional native word. "It is something skill cannot grapple wi' nor care owrecome."

"Old age, Elsie?"

"A broken spirit rather, the minister, Mr. Kirkford, and the doctor say."

Lennard sighed, while Steinie, reckoning on his fingers, said,—

"He would only be sixty come next Beltane day, and I am verging on seventy mysel'."

"Who have been here to see him beside the minister and Dr. Feverley?" asked Lennard.

"Mr. Vere, from Blairavon twice, and Miss Vere almost daily for a time; there is well nigh a pack of her calling cards in the silver basket on the chiffonier," replied Elsie.

"But why only for a time?" he asked, as a sudden suspicion occurred to him.

"Visitors came; among them a baronet, nae less."

"A baronet?"

"Sir Cullender Crowdy and other great folks. So the small ones at Oakwoodlee were forgotten," continued the old woman spitefully, and without perceiving that her words stung the listener, who had before heard of this distinguished personage, and dreaded Hesbia's flirting propensities; "when she did come it should have been on foot as became her, and not on horseback cutting up the gravel, she and her groom," added Elsie, who bore an especial grudge at the Veres.

We have said, that with a Scottish accent, these old servants spoke pretty pure English, which was lucky, as the broad vernacular of the North, like the dialects of Lancashire or Somersetshire, become boredom to a reader.

The return of Mr. Lennard had been a circumstance which suggested a hundred kind offices, and these two old worthies felt that they could not in any way make too much of him.

"He is fond o' this," said they; "and fond o' that too—a salmon trout from the Dhu-linn," so Steinie fished for it; "new-laid eggs," suggested Elsie; so "this, that, and everything" were alike provided for him, and all his wants, wishes, and comforts affectionately studied. "It is not the key of the street-door in your pocket," says Lever, "nor the lease of the premises in your drawer, that make a *home*. Let us be grateful when we remember that in this attribute the humblest shealing on the hillside is not inferior to the palace of the king."

"We are the last of the auld stock, and must be kind to each other," said Steinie, patting the shoulder of his young master, for he quite identified himself with the family whose bread he had eaten for nearly sixty years—ever since

he had been a turnspit in the almost baronial kitchen at Blairavon.

"But here comes Dr. Feverley," added Steinie.

"I was loth to disturb you, sir, and resolved to wait," said Lennard, rising from an almost untasted breakfast, and presenting his hand, as the Doctor entered; "I have to thank you for the telegram—but—but I hope that you may have over-rated the danger—the urgency."

The Doctor, a pleasant and good-looking young man, apparently not quite thirty years of age, shook his head.

"My dear sir, I fear that I have not exaggerated the case. For days past your worthy father has been alternately comatose and delirious: these, with the gradual sinking of the pulse for the last thirty-six hours—a hiccough, a pursing of the lips and puffing of the breath, show that the fatal crisis is not far off," said the Doctor sententiously in a whisper.

And a mournful shade fell over Lennard's face on hearing it.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Elsie, covering her face with her apron; "and a' this to be, though I had water brought ilka day frae the Bullion Well of Inchmachan."

"Tush—sulphuretted hydrogen—quite unsuited to the case, my good woman," said the Doctor, with the slightest perceptible irritation, for he had a special animosity to the mineral well referred to. "The patient still sleeps; when he wakes I shall let you see him," added Feverley to Lennard, who sat in a chair, with a crushed heart and a crushed aspect, gazing dreamily at the fields that stretched far away in the distance, dotted by sheep and lambs that lay basking in the morning sunshine.

"I fear that this protracted illness must have intruded on your time, Doctor," he observed after a long pause, on feeling there was a necessity for saying something.

"The social hours and the professional hours of the medical man who does his duty are alike beyond his control," replied Feverley, smiling.

"I have to thank you for unremitting attention—attention and kindness which I can never repay as they deserve,' added Lennard in a broken voice, as he covered his face with his hands; "but are you sure that you have not mistaken the signs?" he asked, clinging still, as it were, to hope.

"Too sure," replied the Doctor, a little emphatically; "compose yourself; the end, thank God, will be a painless one. The poor old gentleman is going fast 'to the far off land and to that city which hath no need of sun.'"

The Doctor was an anxious, active, and pleasantly-

mannered young man, with a ruddy complexion, a cheerful, smiling face, sandy-coloured hair, and a well worn suit of black. After a hard and thrifty career of study at the Edinburgh university, he had been thankful to take the country practice at Blairavon, with the munificent guaranteed salary of forty pounds per annum for the first year, with a prospect of being appointed to the parochial board, and getting such patients as he might pick up under the patronage of the minister, the family at the mansion-house, and so forth; but poor Feverley found the task of "making ends meet" a hard one. As he told Lennard at another time, "the blacksmith at the cross-roads does all the dentistry of the parish, and the people hereabout are so beastly healthy that I never have the chance of a good case. They never have an ailment; or if they have, a few draughts, to be had for the drawing, from the mineral well at the Tor hill, cure all."

"But my father's illness, Doctor: what is it—old age?"

"Scarcely. It has been as much mental as bodily."

"Mental?"

"More that, perhaps, than the latter. He was always hard pressed for money, as you know; and the worry of a life of conflict with narrow means and its daily routine of debts and duns, have proved rather too much for a proud and haughty temper."

Lennard sighed bitterly, almost angrily, at the doctor's freedom.

"Borrowing cash at ruinous interest from legal harpies, and so on, and so on, till, as you are aware, acre after acre melted away; and now only the house and copsewood of Oakwoodlee remain, of what was once a noble patrimony."

"I am young, Doctor, and the Charter Stone yet is mine," said Lennard, with irritation.

The Doctor gave a feeble little cough, and smiled.

"I have conducted some of his correspondence, and have thus learned that your father has had much to wound his pride during his downward and—pardon me for saying it—improvident career. A Scottish gentleman of the old school—a quaint and often eccentric school, that exists in all ages and countries—he has neither become 'Anglicized on one hand, nor provincialized on the other;' yet he is full of kindly and queer old-fashioned thoughts and sympathies—for instance, his faith in the possession of that ugly block of stone out there, as the palladium of his family."

"My father was always, in the purest sense, a gentleman!" said Lennard, emphatically.

"Undoubtedly; but as for gentlemen," said the Doctor, pursuing some angry thoughts of his own, "in Scotland generally, and in Edinburgh in particular, they have, as some one says somewhere, 'so thinned off of late, or there has been such a deluge of the spurious coin, that one never knows what is real gold;' and nowhere is the spurious brass more current than in all the supposed high places among us."

"But you spoke of my father's ailment as chiefly mental, Doctor," said Lennard, resuming the subject nearest his own heart. "The bitterness of his losses, reverses, and all that, I know; but what more——"

"The discovery of coal on the estate, at the Kaims, after he had parted with it, and the new and unexpected source of great wealth it has become to Mr. Vere, proved the cause of extreme chagrin. He never held up his head after he learned that he had sold, in ignorance of its existence, such a hidden mine of money and relief from all his embarrassments."

"Poor man! poor old man! He had often bored the fields of Kaims, and done so in vain."

"Vere only bored a few inches——"

"Inches!"

"Yes, a few inches deeper in the same places, and found the mineral—a seven-foot seam of pure coal, without the least mixture of clay, and every way equal in quality to the best that the mines of Edinburgh, Glasgow, or Carron can produce."

Lennard bit his nether lip with irrepressible vexation on hearing all this, even though the advantage accrued to the father of Hesbia Vere; and now Elsie Graham, who had slipped away to watch by the sick-bed, came softly in, with her pale and tearful face, to whisper that "the Laird was awake, and asking for Mr. Lennard."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST NIGHT ON EARTH.

With a heart swollen by many home memories and mournful and tender emotions, Lennard Blair entered the old accustomed room in which, as a little boy, he had been wont to come each morning to receive his father's caress and repeat a prayer.

The oppressive atmosphere of protracted sickness was there now, and an ominous row of phials littered all the

mantelpiece. The bed and its faded hangings, the chairs, the table and pictures, the old Indian screen and the oval mirror, all reminded him forcibly of the past; and he sobbed as he hung over his dying father, whose emotions, however, were less violent than he or the Doctor expceted.

Around the room were hung pictures of a few favourite racehorses that had once formed part of the Blairavon stud, and, rivalling those of Lord Eglinton, had borne away the bell at Lanark course, the Queen's Plate at Musselburgh, and elsewhere. Some books lay near the bed; one was a Bible, the others were Sir Bernard Burke's compilations and Nisbet's folio on "Heraldry." Lennard knew the old volume well; the ruling passion was strong to the last; but never more would the filmy eyes skim those leaves, to cull out the honours, the quarterings, and the descent of the Blairs of Blairquhan, Blairavon, and that ilk.

The sick man imbibed thirstily some cooling drink, from an old silver tankard which had been filled and emptied at many a jolly hunting breakfast and dinner. It had among its chasings the Blair arms and crest, a stag's head *caboshed;* and had been fashioned from nuggets of the preeious metal, found long, long ago, among the green Bathgate hills, when a Stuart filled the Scottish throne, and the Blairs were Lords of Blairavon, fortalice and manor, main and meadow, wood and wold, and cocked their bonnets as high as the Preceptors of St. John or the Lairds of Calder.

Lennard found his father, though wasted and wan to an extent which shocked and distressed him, yet looking so bright in eye and so collected in thought, that he almost hoped yet that young Doctor Feverley might be mistaken; but those very symptoms only convinced the latter that this was the last rally of the senses prior to chaos—to utter extinction.

"My dear, dear boy," said the sufferer, with a quavering voice, "so you have come in time to see me before the starting-bell rings? It *has* rung, Lennard; yet, please God, I shall reach the winning-post. 'There is an hour appointed for all the posterity of Adam,' and mine is coming fast, Lennard," he added, a glance of deep affection mingling in his eyes with that strange, keen, and farseeing expression which is often, if not always, discernible in the eyes of the dying, as if the distant land of Destiny, though all unseen by others, seemed close and nigh to them.

"The bonnie buds have burst in the summer woods, Lennard."

"So I saw, dear father," said the young man, as he seated himself, and retained a clammy hand within his own.

"When the green leaves fall and wither, Lennard, I shall be far, far away, in the Land o' the Leal."

Lennard's tears fell fast.

The likeness between father and son was still striking, though old Richard's hair—that had once been like Lennard's, a rich dark brown—was silvery, thin, and scanty now. His eyes were the same hazel-grey; he had the same straight nose and handsome mouth, though the lips were pursed now and had somewhat fallen in. He gathered a little more strength after Elsie gave him a cup of coffee well dashed with brandy, and with something of a sad smile on his face, he said,—

"Elsie has been a perfect Sister of Mercy to me—hovering noiselessly about my bed, doing a thousand acts of kindness, bestowing blessings, Lennard, and receiving them."

Then he added, more gravely,

"You know what day to-morrow is?"

"The first of May, father."

"An unfortunate—a fatal day for us, as you know, Lennard."

"I cannot believe in such things, father."

"It was on that day my father died of his wounds a week after the battle of Villiers en Couche; at a Beltane time my younger brother Lennard disappeared; on another your poor mother died; on another, nearly my whole estate passed into a stranger's hand; and, by to-morrow, I shall have passed away too!"

"Father," implored Lennard, "do not talk in this way."

"Save that I shall leave you alone—most terribly alone in the world, death is welcome; and, save by yourself and one or two more, I won't be much missed, Lennard," he continued, querulously, and speaking with growing difficulty and at greater intervals. "We old country gentlemen are growing out of fashion; we are behind this 'fast age'—that is the phrase, I believe—and the sooner the last of us is gone the better for those who succeed us. A sea of storms and tempests has the world been to me—a world I leave without regret, but for you, Lennard. God has tried me sorely, and yet, it may be, must be, that I, in many ways, have sorely tempted Him."

Then, as if he remembered that all this morality came rather late after a life of reckless extravagance, he added, in a very broken voice,

"We too often make our own destiny—so have I made mine; and, in doing so, perhaps have blighted yours. My poor boy, my folly has lost you one of the finest old estates

in the three Lothians, and were it restored with my health my folly would too likely lose it again."

As if the bitterness of thought overwhelmed him, he closed his eyes and breathed laboriously; then came the hiccough, that puffing of the lips of which Feverley had spoken; playing with the bedclothes, as if the tremulous hands groped in darkness; and when the eyes opened, they seemed to look vacantly as if at passing atoms.

At last he spoke again.

"Better it is to be great than rich—better to be good than either, especially when one comes to lie where I am now—face to face with eternity. My boy—my poor boy, would that I knew what Fate has in store for you after I am gone! Yet, if the great Book of Destiny were before me, dear Lennard, I would shrink from turning the page. I can only pray that there may be, at least, in the future, that wealth of which I have deprived you."

"My father, do not speak thus; besides, you will exhaust yourself. Wealth does not ensure happiness. Fear not for me; I am industrious, and shall work."

"Work!" repeated the old man bitterly, almost scornfully, as if the word stung him; "there was a time, but, pshaw! it is past—it is past."

It was not until he had found himself at home, in that very chamber of sickness, and surrounded by so many well-remembered features and objects, that Lennard Blair quite realised—to use a now favourite and accepted Americanism—that he was face to face with death, and that his venerated father, the only link between him and all their storied past, was actually fading away.

Poor old man! for a time, long as the lives of most men now in this fast living age of ours, he had been used to most of the luxuries, and certainly all the comforts, of the position he had forfeited by careless improvidence—a position which his son might never know or enjoy; and now the very expense of his own funeral harassed him!

It had been an idiosyncrasy of Richard Blair's character that while he scorned the imputation of being obliged to any man, alive or dead, he never had the slightest hesitation to eke and add to his miserable fortune by the contraction of debts, the liquidation of which was a somewhat vague and hopeless prospect; but a long career of days upon the turf, of nights at play, of contested elections, of security for fast friends, and of a hundred other follies, had rendered such contractions easy and familiar.

All was well nigh over now; doubts, debts, and difficulties

were at times forgotten, and then he would imagine himself again the Laird of Blairavon, and in the great manor house, the turrets of which overtopped its old ancestral woods.

Tall in figure, though attenuated and thin, he was a man with a decided presence; the once bronzed face—bronzed as that of any old Grenadier of the *Garde*—by exposure in the hunting field, by fishing and shooting, was pale enough now; the long mustachios were white as snow, and the sunken eyes were keen and bright, sad and unnaturally beautiful: and so, while Lennard lingered there, glances were exchanged full of grief and affection, while they clasped each other's hands, and for spaces of time remained silent.

It was evident that, without physical pain, the grim King of Terror was gradually loosing the "silver cord" of the sufferer, who spoke again, but this time almost in a whisper.

"I have little to leave you, dear Lennard—oh! so little, my poor boy; but you'll take care of Elsie if you can, and old Steinie too; give the poor fellow my Galloway cob—a welcome gift—he is getting frail now. Keep what remains of this old place; and never, while you have life, part with the Charter Stone; promise me this?"

"I do promise you, father."

"Slender though my means, I ought to have insured my life for you, Lennard; it was the least recompense I could have made you for my bad stewardship."

"Oh, do not talk thus!" entreated Lennard.

"Yes, insured it, that something might accrue to you—a help, who knows, to regain the old place—Blairavon I mean, lost—lost by me; but the thought came too late, and the premium would have ruined me."

"I am young and strong, father, so think not of me."

"It was my fondest hope, my golden dream, that by your successful efforts, I might one day drive up the old elm avenue that leads to Blairavon gate, its lord and master; but this wild hope can never be realised by me, though by you it may be, Lennard. Oh, it galls me, even in death, the thought that he should be there——"

"Who, father?"

"That man Verc—the trickster, the money-lender, whose sole knowledge of his family consists in the fact that his father was born before him. But his path has been upward in the world—mine downward; and so the gentleman and the parvenu have changed places."

"Father, father," urged Lennard, somewhat shocked by

this pride and bitterness at such a solemn time, "you exhaust and torment yourself."

"I am weak enough—wicked enough it may be, to hate the man for winning what I have lost; and yet—yet, on one account would I forgive him."

"I have no great esteem for him either, father; his manner at times has been both cold and repulsive to me," replied Lennard; "but name the means of your forgiveness—your wish, and I shall tell him."

"Let him marry his absurd-looking daughter—what a shocking seat the girl has on horseback—marry her——"

"To whom?"

"To *you*, and give with her, all the land that once was your own. I have heard your names already jingled together by gossips hereabout."

"For Heaven's sake, dearest father, do not think or talk of such things," said Lennard, glancing hastily round; but fortunately they were quite alone.

Then he became silent, and felt a pang, even in deceiving his father by silence; but little could the proud and querulous old man have understood the honest and true love that was in his son's breast for Hesbia Vere, the daughter of the man he despised, unjustly perhaps; or how nervously Lennard shrunk from the fear that any advance on his part might be coldly repelled, as the trickery of a mere fortune-hunter, following out the path so bluntly and openly recommended.

"However, it is perhaps better that this should not be," added the poor old gentleman, in his antiquated ideas of the world, of men, and manners.

"Why, father?" asked Lennard, anxiously.

"Because it is by such ill-sorted alliances that the pure *sangre azul*, the blue blood of old families, becomes diluted and spoiled."

Lennard thought otherwise; but he was silent, and full of unhappy and mortifying reflections.

"How much would Mr. Vere value the *sangre azul* of the beggared and bankrupt Blairs of Blairavon?" he pondered, and then reproached himself, as if the question conveyed a censure on his father, who, as the day passed on, sank lower and lower.

"Don't be surprised, Lennard," said Mr. Blair, as if he divined his son's silent thoughts. "My remarks are only the last kick of the old horse—the ruling passion strong in death; greater and weaker men than I, have shown it. As Scott has it, inexorable death 'has closed the long avenue

upon loves and friendships, and I look at them as through the grated door of a burial-place filled with the monuments of those who once were dear to me.' Aye, aye ; the long avenue of love and friendship is closing now, and growing dark—very dark, indeed, Lennard !"

There were times when his mind wandered, and he seemed to be living over the past again, the years that had gone. Then he would speak of his dead brother as a little playfellow, or he thought of Lennard as a child once more nestling on the knee of his mother, who had long been dead; and then he would mutter of the Charter Stone, of his racehorses and incidents of the betting-ring.

Day passed, and slowly and wearily followed the night of anxiety; the summer sun was gilding brightly the summit of the highest peak of the green Pentland range, the sun of the 1st of May.

"So, so," said Richard Blair, with a smile, as the light seemed to pass out of his eyes, and his clammy grasp of Lennard's hand relaxed ; "I have passed my last night on earth, and this Beltane morning I am now going to rejoin her who is not lost, but gone before me—your poor mother who is dead and gone, Lennard—dead and gone !"

He spoke slowly, humbly, and prayerfully of a happier land, and a glorious promise. There was a solemn yet fond farewell on his pinched features, as he turned from the hills that shone in the sunlight, to search for his son's face, and then his spirit passed away.

As the lower jaw fell, and a mortal pallor spread over those beloved features, there rose in the heart of Lennard, a wild desire to clutch at something, to rush away for aid, though all the skill of the College of Physicians would have availed him nothing now !

After he had closed the eyes of the dead, he hung caressingly about the body—*it* was his father, still ; but Dr. Feverley and the parish minister, Doctor Magnus Kirkford, a kind and benevolent old gentleman, unclasped his hands and led him away, leaving Elsie with the body, for she would permit no strange hands to touch it.

If it be true, as some aver, that the eyes of the departed retain upon their filmy retina the likeness of the last person on whom they gazed, then assuredly was the face of Lennard Blair impressed upon the closed orbs of the old man who had just passed away.

"I thought myself a stoic," said poor Lennard, as he seated himself in the sunlit parlour again; "a stoic," he repeated, for like many other young fellows of his age, he was rather

fond of deluding himself into the idea that he was a man of the world, and rather knew what life was; "but this blow, Doctor Kirkford, has unmanned me quite, and I feel as if I were a little child again."

"A follower of Zeno at your years, my young friend, you know not what you say!" replied the old clergyman, patting him kindly on the shoulder. "What would the world come to, if men grew stoics at five-and-twenty? Yet man is but a shadow, and life a dream. So the old man hath gone to his long home, and his dream of life is over."

"There are times, my dear sir, when I feel my heart like adamant, in a stupor of grief, stolid as Binny Craig; and at others, weak as the water that trickles down its sides."

"All that will pass away anon, my young friend; for happily God soothes, and Time softens all things."

Reverently, and with an emotion of compunction, as if he was committing an act of sacrilege, he removed from his dead father's hand an antique signet-ring, with his crest and motto thereon, one which the deceased had always worn. Lennard placed it on a finger, little foreseeing then the part that trinket was to play in the chequered drama of his future life.

CHAPTER V.

BELTANE DAY.

"You shall look no more, my young friend! The pinched features which seem to mock life rather than to emulate it, are but an unpleasant memory of a beloved relation; so let the chamber of death be arranged without you."

So spoke kindly but emphatically the Reverend Magnus Kirkford—one of those big, shrewd, warm-hearted, large-brained, and earnest men, with long upper lips, full mental organs, and keen perceptive qualities, who make their mark in the Scottish Church—as he drew Lennard away for the second time from the presence of the dead; then the young man took his hat, left the house, and issued forth into the fields.

The early May morning was beautiful; the sun shone in unclouded brilliance, far away masses of cloud, fleecy-white or cream-coloured, floated over the green wavy slopes of the Pentlands, casting their changing shadows on eminence and ravine, while buried in thought, Lennard strolled slowly on by a deep and grassy path beside a trouting stream, where aged larches and chesnuts spread their branches overhead,

through which the sunshine fell in golden flakes and flashes on the reeds and water-lilies that floated on the current, and on an occasional brown trout, as it shot with the speed of light over "the unnumbered pebbles." Amid the solitude there was no sound but the gurgle of the water, and the hum of the mountain bee as it buried itself in the drooping cups of the pink foxglove or the Scottish bluebell.

The place was conducive to thought and to melancholy. Lennard's old trouting stream was flowing then as it had flowed when he, a child, had launched fleets of walnut-shells upon its bosom—unchanging, unceasing, never fading, shrinking, or growing older—and he gazed on its gurgling current as on the face of an early friend.

The rattle of a train of heavily-laden carts passing along the distant highway from Vere's coal-pits at the Mains of Kaims, was a novel sound there; but whichever way Lennard turned, some old and familiar object inseparably connected with the past, with the dead, or with his happy, heedless boyhood, met his eye.

In an adjacent meadow his father's old Galloway cob—one of those sturdy little horses alleged by the Galwegians to have sprung from the stallions of the wrecked Spanish armada—was quietly grazing. Here were trees and yonder hedges of his own planting. Two miles distant some light-grey smoke curled up from amid the green woodlands, and he knew that there stood the stately old mansion of Blairavon.

Nearer on the sunny hill-slope was the less pretentious house of Oakwoodlee, with all the window-blinds drawn closely down, according to the Scottish custom at such a solemn time; thus by its aspect seeming so indicative of silence, of desolation, of death, and of the presence of one who would never cross its threshold save once again, borne slowly shoulder high.

Yonder was the Charter Stone, round which so many local and family legends hovered. The great block of ages past, where his ancestors and King James IV had hobbed and nobbed at a hunting-party, in the days when fords were scarce and waters deep, and when bulls and stags were thick as wild berries in the woods of Blairavon and Calder; and further off, at the base of Craigellon—an eminence of grey rock, tufted with yellow broom, lay the pond, the lochlet or rushy tarn, in which, on a Beltane day, some thirty years ago, his uncle Lennard had been found drowned.

Could it really be true that Beltane, the 1st of May, was a day of destiny to his family? Did such an idea not seem absurd in these our days of steam and telegraphy, of mental power, of progress, and of paper collars?

Till informed by Elsie Graham and Stephen Hislop, Lennard never knew the exact story of his uncle's fate; for something of sorrow and mystery in it had always sealed his father's lips on the subject.

It would seem that before the marriage of Lennard's mother, Richard Blair and his brother had both loved her; but she preferred the elder, so the younger disappeared on the day subsequent to the wedding, Beltane morning, greatly to the grief and dismay of all the family.

In vain was the country searched, and in vain were the innkeepers and ostlers on every route and line of road examined. There were no railways in Scotland then, so the guards and drivers of the mails were questioned, and the church-doors of all the adjacent parishes placarded. In vain were advertisements inserted in the public prints, for no trace was found of the lost man till the exact day twelvemonths after his disappearance, when Steinie Hislop's otter terrier discovered a dead body,—sorely decomposed, disfigured, and almost reduced to a skeleton—among the reeds and broad-leaved water-docks, in the little loch under Craigellon.

From various indications, but chiefly the remains of his dress, it was declared to be the body of Lennard Blair; but whether in his grief and mortification he had committed suicide, whether he had fallen into the loch by accident, or been assaulted and flung in, no one could assume with certainty. The circumstance that neither ring, purse, nor watch were found upon him seemed to indicate some dark tragedy, more especially as gypsies had been seen in the woods about the time of his disappearance; but it was a case in which neither the sheriff nor the procurator-fiscal for the county could make anything. So the remains were laid in the grave of the Blairs, in the old and secluded churchyard of Inchmachan, and the story, a "nine-days' wonder" while it lasted, was speedily committed to oblivion by all save Richard Blair, who sincerely loved his brother, and long mourned in secret his untimely fate.

From gazing on Craigellon and reflecting on this dark story, Lennard turned thoughtfully to that other land-mark of his family, the great monolith called the Charter Stone; the retention of which was alleged by tradition to be so inseparably connected with the fortune of the Blairs, that it had actually occupied the dying thoughts of his father.

Without being vulgarly superstitious—though to give undue weight to idle fancies is often the peculiarity of the German and the Scot—Lennard was too much of the latter

to be able to thrust aside the old and inbred feeling. Though no believer in spiritualism, or other semi-extinct absurdities, he thought that there might be a world unseen by and unknown to us; a world, of which we have lost the key, or never possessed it. He thought that nature might have her night-shade, as Mrs. Crowe has laboured hard to shew us, and that there might be "more things in heaven and earth," than Horatio dreamt of in his philosophy.

A standing stone of the Druid days, it had probably been there ages before the Romans had their flying camps on the Mains of Kaims, and was covered now by masses of green moss and russet-coloured lichens.

It was a strange coincidence, that on the day before his disappearance, his uncle Lennard, when probably wandering there in sadness and bitterness of heart, had carved his name on the monolith, in some freak, or lest he should too soon be forgotten, perhaps.

Such solid symbols of the possession of land as this Charter Stone are not uncommon in Scotland.

They were often used to denote a right to the soil long before written documents became general, and frequently had—like the Pillar of Refuge, at Torphichen—ideal privileges attached to them. If a man set his back against the monolith of this description in Girvan, he supposed himself able to defy the law of arrest; nor could cattle fastened thereto be poinded for debt. Such, perhaps, was the Charter Stone of old Dailly in Carrick, which the people, a few years ago, would not permit to be removed lest misfortune should fall upon the locality. Such was the stone of the Glove *Clach-Mannan;* such, no doubt, was the famous old Blue Stone, some twenty feet long, now buried in the Castle Hill of Edinburgh; the Clach-na-Cudden of Inverness, and such was literally the Chair of Fate at Scone, the charter stone of the kingdom. So the story of the Charter Stone of the Blairs was simply an old Scottish idea, and not a solitary one either.

There was an angry blush on Lennard's cheek as he thought of how his practical, hard-working, every-day friends in Liverpool would have laughed at the dreams in which he was indulging, for he had now gone back, as we have said, to the pastoral, lonely, and narrow world from which he had emerged under the patronage of Mr. Vere; but from his reverie he was roused by a sound, and on the highway at the base of the slope on which the great stone stands, there dashed past an elegant mail-phaeton, a very "fast" looking

affair, with patent lever break and plated axles, drawn by a pair of spanking geldings fifteen hands high.

A lady was seated beside the gentleman who drove them, and Lennard felt his pulses quicken as they swept along with wheels and harness flashing in the sun. They were chatting and laughing, even loudly, together; in one he recognized Hesbia Vere, and in the other, beyond a doubt, his impertinent fellow-traveller by the express train; and now, deep though his present grief, some very unpleasant and conflicting thoughts occurred to him.

He looked at his watch: the hour was early—barely ten in the forenoon—so whither could they be bound? To some pic-nic, steeplechase, otter-hunt, or other scene of thoughtless happiness, no doubt, while he——he turned in bitterness away.

A great grief makes us selfish sometimes; even so does a great love; so in the midst of his sharp sorrow Lennard Blair had almost forgotten the existence of Hesbia Vere since the moment his father had spoken of her.

Amid that sorrow worldly thoughts *would* intrude themselves, for he knew that even the wreck of his father's fortune was embarrassed, and thus, that his own monetary future was uncertain and shadowy.

Lennard freely spoke of these fears to Doctor Feverley, a kind and good-hearted fellow, who now spent much of his leisure time with him, for he pitied the loneliness of young Blair, who had now not a near relation in the world.

Cards "of condolence," glazed and embossed, per powdered and plushed footmen, came promptly enough from Blairavon and from the houses of old country friends, who remembered Richard Blair when he was the Master of the Foxhounds and hunted the county as it had never been hunted since, and when he was the king of good fellows, with his cellars and stables full; but Lennard took their "bits of pasteboard" for as much as they were worth, and clung thankfully and gratefully to the companionship of the young Doctor.

The mode of half-intimacy and half-patronage in which he was received at Blairavon and some of the other great mansions in the neighbourhood—he a scholar, a gentleman by education, by conduct, and by diploma—had stung Frank Feverley to the quick at first; but he had an aged mother to support,—a mother who doted on him, and who conceived him to be the greatest light in the school of medicine, one to whom Simpson, Bell, and Hunter were as nothing; so the Doctor consoled himself by the old Scottish proverb, "he

yat tholis overcomes," and thus, for her sake, was the conqueror in the end.

After the mockery of dining that day, as they lingered over a bottle of fine old Madeira which Steinie had carefully aired in the sunshine, the Doctor strove to encourage Lennard by his advice.

"Your good father, Mr. Blair, fought the battle of life sturdily, if not wisely, and now 'after life's fitful fever he sleeps well.' But you will agree with me, that it is futile to be regretfully looking into the past as he did; for the past can return no more."

"True, Doctor, true—it has ceased to be ours."

"So our task should be to improve the *present*, and to hope for all in the future."

"And such shall be my course, Feverley."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for such has been mine, and I have seldom known the system to fail."

"My two or three thousands are, I know, but a trifle in the great capital of Vere, Cheatwood, & Co., but still I am useful, especially with their Spanish and South American correspondence. I work hard—at times I literally drudge like a slave—and may well hope to treble and quadruple my little sum in time. Then I have still this old jointure-house and the land of Oakwoodlee, or a fragment of it; after the —the funeral we shall know all," he added with a quivering lip.

For us, says a brilliant female writer, "mercifully the capacity of suffering is blunted as the years go by; the mental nerves lose their sensitiveness; the mind, like the body, grows hard; and the agony of to-day will become the passing annoyance of twelve months hence."

Though mortifications, jealousies, bitterness, and slights, incident to his subordinate position and slender means, were nothing new to Lennard Blair, whose naturally generous and fiery spirit they chafed and exasperated, sorrow was a novel suffering, and he felt that the death of his old father was indeed a keen, keen *wrench*.

But one more scene remained to act out the domestic tragedy before he could leave Oakwoodlee—the funeral day, —and it came in due time.

CHAPTER VI.

DUST TO DUST.

AMONG the various cards that littered the table, Lennard looked in vain for one of Hesbia Vere.

"This may be an oversight, or it may be that she deems her father's message sufficient," thought he, and thus strove to allay the gnawing doubt that was in his heart.

The day of the funeral came, and for long after it had passed away did the whole scene float like a dream in Lennard's memory. The bright sunshine, the green summer woods, the gathering friends, the tread of many feet where all had been silence before, the bustle of carriages; the gloomy hearse, with its mocking plumes, under which lay the last real friend he had on earth; the mattocks and shovels; and by the old grey churchyard wall, the deep grave, that lay "lurking and gaping for its prey!"

The whole affairs of the day seemed a species of phantasmagoria, amid which Lennard acted and moved like an automaton. His situation was, to him, a novel one; and he was watched by a few sympathizing, and by many curious eyes, for he was the last of an old and long-respected family.

Richard Blair's inordinate pride of the latter, his old-fashioned estimate of the fortuitous claims of birth, which jarred so oddly with his poverty, were all forgotten now; and those who had often laughed at him therefor, as they gathered in the antique and plainly furnished dining-room, to partake of a little luncheon before the "lifting," as it is locally phrased, looked up with real respect and melancholy interest to the portraits of the Blairs of other times—full-lengths from Blairavon, a world too large for Oakwoodlee—stately fellows in wigs and long waistcoats or cuirasses, who had fought for the Stuarts at Killycrankie, Dunkeld, and Dunblane; and powdered dames, whose patches, rouge, and smiles had vanquished the heroes of Falkirk and Fontenoy, of Minden and Quebec.

How intensely Lennard wished the whole affair over!

There was the darkened or subdued light in the apartment; the groups of half-strangers, who whispered of the weather, crops, and cattle, or sat moodily silent; the cold greetings and formal grasping of hands; the solemn faces made up for the occasion; the greedy fellows in corners enjoying the cold beef and wine or the cakes and whisky!

Then the absence of nearly all religious ceremonial seemed irreverent to the dead, and shocking to Lennard, accustomed as he had been for some years past to the service of the Church of England, to strange and ritualistic forms, and to prayers intoned by surpliced clergymen in red-lined Oxford hoods. Yet poor old Doctor Magnus Kirkford's extempore invocation came straight from his earnest and honest heart, though it might have sounded painfully harsh, and perhaps vulgar, in the ear of a dainty Oxonian Lutheran, who may lisp his devotions with the aid of a diamond ring, a cambric handkerchief, and parted hair.

Close by the minister stood the portly person of Mr. John Vere (in his own estimation the first man in the parish), musing, and playing with large handfuls of loose silver, a custom he had when plunging his hands deep into his trowsers pockets, for Vere was never known to have a purse.

The prayer of the Calvinist was followed by a chapter from Isaiah, a new and excellent feature amid the almost barbarous plainness that marks the Scottish funeral; and then the train of carriages wended slowly through the shady lanes and summer woods towards the old parish church. Mr. Vere was, of course, in his own showy vehicle; it brought up the rear of the funeral train, which was accompanied by many of the old tenantry afoot, and each and all were clad in that clean and sober black-cloth suit which few of the Scottish peasantry, however poor or humble, are without.

Among his neighbours of former times, Richard Blair had been deemed a fine jolly fellow, a boon companion over a bottle of Burgundy or whisky-toddy, a good rider across the stiffest hunting country, never was known to "funk" at a double ditch or a stone wall, and as one who always rode straight to hounds. Many of those old neighbours of the hunt were dead and gone, and among their sons he had been viewed simply as a bore—a proud, soured, cynical, and morbidly discontented old man; while Lennard, though not blind to his father's defects of temper and former failings, could view him now only through the softening medium of grief and filial regard.

"Poor old Blairavon!" he heard Ranald Cheyne of the Haughs—a fine old ruddy-faced country gentleman—say to another, as they dismounted at the churchyard-gate; "he used to be a two-bottle man in my day, and the king of all good fellows!"

"Hush, Mr. Cheyne, that is his son," said Doctor Feverley, who was near.

"Little Lennard—I remember, I remember him now," replied the other, as he shook Lennard's hand kindly, and pressed him to come over and see him and his girls at the Haughs, where a knife and fork would always be ready for him; but Lennard answered vaguely, for he was in a land of painful dreams.

"Good Heaven! how the time passes," resumed Mr. Cheyne; "it seems but yesterday when we had that slapping run with the Linlithgow foxhounds at Boghall, when only three riders out of a large field were in at the death—your worthy father, Mr. Lennard, old Hislop, and myself. Poor Steinie! he is, I see, sorely cut up," added Ranald Cheyne, who, though the head of one of the best county families, kindly shook the hand of the old servant.

Several other foxhunting friends were there voluntarily, for they still remembered the jolly fellow of other times, and recognized in the dead Laird of Blairavon a person of consideration and distinction, and their sturdy champion against Parliamentary Reform and the Corn-law League.

The ancient church dedicated to a holy man of the olden time—the Scottish Saint Machan, who died in the 9th century—crowns a steep and grassy knoll, at the base of which flows a brawling stream. Thick old copsewood, amid which the white walls of the pretty manse are peeping, surrounds the knoll, which is studded with old headstones half sunk in the long rank grass that sprouts above the dust of many, many generations.

Ruined at the storm of the Reformation, and repaired amid the stern wars of the Covenant, the old stained glass of its arched windows has long since given place to square panes of green-bottle hue, with bulls'-eyes in the centre of many; but the deep doors of the Scoto-Norman period, with their zig-zag mouldings and grotesque carvings still remain unchanged as when the Crusaders of St. John had their banner floating on Torphichen, and Scotland's kings held royal state in their noblest palace at Linlithgow.

The vault of the Blairs had always been on the south side. This aisle, or side of every ancient church, had the pre-eminence in memory of an old tradition, that when our Saviour died he had turned towards the south; so, in great churches, there stood the abbot's chair, and there most persons of rank were buried.

As the funeral train, all on foot now, passed into the burying-ground, a young man who stood on the slope by

which the gate is approached, and who seemed to be loitering there out of mere curiosity, lifted his wide-awake hat and stood uncovered.

As this token of respect to the passing dead is little known in the lowlands of Scotland—or has been so since the Reformation—Lennard regarded the stranger with some interest, and recognized the saucy face, the fair mustachios, and goatee-beard of his railway companion.

What secret emotion was it that made him, even in that solemn time of grief, shrink from this man's cold, enquiring and impudent eyes—eyes in which he read, somehow, the expression of enmity and future mischief, for over the face of the loiterer there spread something of a sneering smile, as he replaced his hat and turned away with his fishing-rod.

Before the dark procession, shovel on shoulder, marched old Malcolm Mattox, the grave-digger. Even he was sad, and soberly clad in a venerable and rusty suit of black; and thus he led the way to the ground where the Blairs lie, "whar he had ne'er made a lair," as he whispered to Steinie, since Lennard's mother had been laid beside that unfortunate brother, who had not loved her "wisely, but too well."

The summer wind rustled the green leaves of the old woods with a sighing sound, that mingled with the sobs of a few aged people, who thought of all the past, and sorrowed for the kind and passionate, but ruined old gentleman; and those sighs of the wind and sobs of the people seemed, somehow, to speak to young Lennard's grateful heart of the rest his dead father had found.

At last it was all over; Mattox's shovel had batted down the last sod, and he had touched his bonnet and withdrawn. Friends and followers were gone, and with a pressure of the hand, and a general invitation to Lennard to "turn up at Blairavon," Mr. Vere went towards his carriage.

"Come over," continued Hesbia's portly papa, "whenever you feel up to the mark—that is, tired of your own company, or a longing for ours."

"Thanks ——"

"We've always a knife and fork—a spare cover or two laid, you can never be in the way. Remember, luncheon at 2, dinner at 7—our old time for both, as out at our villa on the Aigburth Road. But my advice to you would be, to get back to your desk; nothing is so soothing to the nervous system as business;" and, jingling the handfuls of silver that lurked in the depths of his right pocket, he retired.

Lennard found himself again in the lonely parlour of Oakwoodlee, with Elsie Graham hovering near him.

His father's old and well-worn arm-chair was opposite: he did not occupy it, but preferred to sit and fancy the outline of the old man in it, and think that something of his presence still hovered there. His silver-headed cane was in the chimney-corner close by, and under the chair were still his slippers and his favourite old otter terrier.

For reasons of his own, Lennard Blair was in no haste to return to Liverpool; he passed several days alone, seeing nothing even of Fevcrley, nothing of his friends at Blairavon, and hearing of Hesbia only that which he had rather was not told him.

Lennard found, as he had expected, that save the house and its furniture, the old family pictures and mementos, with the little piece of coppice, the shooting thereof, and the right of fishing in the adjacent stream, nothing remained to him; that there were many debts to pay, and that now more than ever must his chief dependence be on his desk in the house of Vere, Cheatwood & Co. But he experienced somewhat of a shock, together with a glow of gratitude, when he spoke of the future of his two old dependents.

"You have saved something, I hope, Steinie?" said he anxiously, to old Hislop.

"Saved, Mr. Lennard?" repeated Steinie, confusedly.

"You have been so long with my father, Steinie—you, and Elsie too."

"Oh yes, Mr. Lennard," answered Elsie, curtseying and answering for both; "Steinie and I have both saved and laid by for a rainy day; but alack! it has proved one of wintry storm to us."

"I am so glad of your thrift; those savings will help you now."

"No muckle, Mr. Lennard, I fear," sighed Steinie, as the colour deepened on his old and withered face.

"Steinie!" ejaculated Elsie, in a tone of reprehension.

And now, after a time, and much circumlocution, Lennard learned that, during his father's protracted illness or decline, these two faithful old creatures had spent all their little hoardings in procuring for him much that he would have been unable to obtain for himself; and that he had passed away in ignorance of where the money came from! So Lennard resolved that, in future, Oakwoodlee should be, as it had hitherto been, their home, with such an allowance as he could spare them out of his pittance at Liverpool.

Fierce and stubborn had been the long struggle between

the old pride of the Blairs and their new poverty, ere Richard, whilom of Blairavon, would permit his son, with the money he inherited from his mother, to engage in mercantile pursuits under the auspices of the more wise and thrifty speculator who won the acres which he, himself, had not the sense to keep ; but, luckily, Lennard liked business, and prudently had been most attentive thereto ; viewing it, perhaps, as the beginning of an end—as the means to an ultimate consummation.

Yet now, when again in his native scenes,—when after the weariness of incessant work, the ceaseless grinding, the hurlyburly, din and rush of life in Liverpool, by street and dock, by road and river, he felt how grateful indeed was the calm of Oakwoodlee, and the pure breeze that came from the great slopes of the Pentland Hills, laden with the fragrance of the purple heather and the golden bells of the gorse bushes, while the scenery around the old house, the older church of King David's days, the trouting burn, and the quaint bridge that spanned it, filled his heart with soft and gentle emotions.

The yellow broom, the hawthorn pink and white, the gorgeous laburnum and purple lilac, the guelder rose, with its snow-white bells and tender green leaves, were in all their beauty now ; while the violet with its sweet perfume, the pansy with its velvet leaves, the lily and tulip, were duly developed under Steinie's care in the little garden.

Old Elsie had one great weakness of character.

Displaced from what she conceived to be her high estate as housekeeper at Blairavon, she loathed the lucky Veres as veritable intruders, as if they had won the place by the sword, by fraud or force, instead of in the open market ; and poor Miss Vere came in for her share of especial dislike.

"As for that madam, Miss Hesbia," said she, a few days after the funeral, when Lennard was smoking moodily at the parlour window, "she'll never come to any but an ill end."

"Of whom are you permitting yourself to talk so freely Elsie?"

"As the poor laird that's dead and gone used to call her, the proud parvenoo's daughter, which means, I suppose, something that's dishonest."

"How—why, what on earth do you mean, Elsie?" asked Lennard with undisguised asperity in his tone. "Do you refer to Miss Vere?"

"To who else, Mr. Lennard! To see her in kirk, either

here or at Inchmachan, flaunting her ribbons and laces, smoothing her hair, fitting and refitting her dainty kid gloves, and jangling her bracelets. And then she whispers, and leers, and laughs so with that gentleman——"

"Which gentleman—who?" asked Lennard with forced indifference of manner, thinking of him of the mail-phaeton and white wide-awake.

"Oh, any one—any one, a' are welcome fish that come into her net."

Aware as he was of Hesbia's flirting proclivities, the remark stung Lennard deeply.

"And on the Sabbath," resumed Elsie. "My only wonder is——"

"Is what?"

"That nae judgment has yet fallen upon her; but her pride will have a fall, sae sure as my name is Elsie Graham!"

"Do not talk nonsense, or be so uncharitable, Elsie; and leave me just now, as I would rather be alone," replied Lennard, unwilling that this sharp-sighted old woman should detect perhaps his secret thoughts, which were far from pleasant ones, for she had mentioned incidentally more than once that Miss Vere had been seen riding, driving, sketching, and rambling about "mair than was beseeming," with a gentleman who was on a visit to her father.

He knew her weakness, her vanity—great almost as her beauty; and jealousy, with anger, grew strong within him, for in his frame of mind, weakened by recent sorrow and thus easily impressionable, suspicions soon became convictions, as his heart began to change its grief for bitterness.

"I shall take Vere's advice, and start for Liverpool to-morrow—plunge again into the whirl of business, of dissipation perhaps, and forget all about her! I must push on somehow," he would say to himself; "I must make more rapid steps towards my El Dorado—towards fortune. I cannot be a subordinate, a quill-driving clerk, for ever, like poor old Envoyse and thousands of others, who have let slip that chance which every man has at least *once* in life. So Liverpool be it again!"

And yet he lingered on at the lonely and almost voiceless house of Oakwoodlee, in the hope of seeing Hesbia Vere, though the complications of his position with her father made his love for her a matter of difficulty to develop or declare, much more so than if she had been the daughter of any other man, even with all their great disparity of means and prospects for the future; and yet he could not

deny himself the half-desperate hope, the pleasing flattery, of creating for himself some lasting and permanent interest in her heart ere it might be lost to him for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

DAY DREAMS.

SLOWLY passed the days while he lingered at home, where the change was a great and complete one, away from the bustle of Liverpool, with its theatres, concerts and flower-shows, regattas and balls, the rush of cabs and carriages, the rattle of omnibuses and lumbering vans or laden lorries; away from its miles of docks and mighty fleets of merchantmen; away from protested bills, discount and interest, legitimate acceptances, custom-house clearances, ledger and daybook, bills of lading, charter-parties, telegrams, letters and files, invoices and inventories, and all the bother and slang of business, which are as Sanscrit or Oordoo to the upper ten thousand of her Majesty's lieges.

Away from the dingy counting-room in that narrow alley off Canning Place; away from the crowded quays, the taverns, back parlours, tea-gardens, and billiard-rooms; away from Sundays on the river and trips to Birkenhead; away from cosy dens, where quiet little dinners were had, and where clerks and confidentials like old Mr. Envoyse took the air and drank their beer or Cape Madeira, and compared notes of firms and failures, while pressing the tobacco into their pipes or rolling up their cigarettes, with knowing glances and eyes half-closed the while.

Lennard was away from all this now, and back once more to the green, sequestered world of his boyhood.

The great house at Blairavon, he had been told, was full of visitors, scarcely one of whom he had seen as yet; but he heard frequently of Hesbia, whose name was mixed up with that of a certain mysterious baronet, who rejoiced in the odd patronymic of Sir Cullender Crowdy. The fear of rivalry grew strong in his heart; and as he brooded over what was now, together with all that *might* have been—the past, the present, and the future—he felt for the time no very good feeling towards the great world that lay beyond the windows of Oakwoodlee.

He remembered that Miss Vere had called frequently there—almost daily—during his father's last illness.

Why did she abstain from coming now? To be sure,

there was no lady to visit; but Hesbia despised all prudery, and was not wont to stand greatly on trifles or punctilio either.

Days passed, during which he never ventured near Blairavon; an uncertain emotion of half doubt, half childish pique at Miss Vere, withheld him.

Inspired by his father's teaching, Lennard Blair, though by no means a visionary, but rather a practical and hard-working fellow, had more than once, when standing under the stately old trees, the leaves of which had fallen on generations of his ancestors, looked with intense regret at the old mansion of Blairavon, at the fair estate of fertile field and grassy meadow, hamlet and hedgerow, stretching away to the hills, so rich and beautiful in aspect—he looked, we say, but sadly and wistfully, for never would it be his, as it had been his sires' in the days of old!

It was gone, irrevocably gone, by no fault of his; and as he turned away, a vague, unuttered vow would rise to his lips.

Dreams—golden ones certainly—of more active means of attaining his ultimate hope, and of his father's desire, would come upon him, as he lay stretched on the green sward, gazing into the depths of the blue sky, while the old rooks cawed monotonously in the great gnarled trees close by.

Of how many adventurers had he heard who, in the fertile wastes of Australia, by the Swan River, the land of kangaroo skins, of the vine, and the olive, or in some remote isle of the Pacific or Southern Sea, discovered their "El Dorado," where gold and gems and treasure were amassed as in an Arabian tale?

True; but, suggested Prudence, of how many, many *more*, who strive only to fail and die, do we hear nothing? Courage, energy, perseverance, and bodily strength were required for such a vague and hard career. All these he had; but there was Hesbia—the light round which he had fluttered like a moth—could he relinquish the chance, the slender chance, of winning her love, or at least of relieving his heart by the declaration of his own?

The progress to fortune, at his desk in the dark alley off Canning Place, would be a slow one.

"Oh, the heartless weariness of working eternally for other people, and never for one's self!" he exclaimed bitterly, as he struck his hands together.

Yet it was there, in that dingy Liverpool alley, he had garnered up his hopes of realizing an independence—of winning—dared he hope she would wait for him?—Hesbia

Vere. He had always pictured a visionary ideal, as few young men have not, of what the woman he would love ought to be; and *now* he thought that he had found this ideal realised in her.

"But how am I ever to propose to this proud and coquettish girl," thought he, "with my monetary recommendations—my paltry share in the firm, my small salary, and the acre or two round the old Jointure House. With much of hope, but no certainty in the future, could I go to that most mercenary fellow, old Vere, and ask for his only daughter and heiress?"

Then his father's somewhat selfish words occurred to him: "Let him marry his absurd-looking daughter to you, and give with her all the land that was once our own,"—and he shivered at the recollection of how they sounded, and at the thought of how his passion might be viewed by Hesbia as well as by her father; and he nervously shrunk from the double chance of rejection and ridicule.

"Her regard for me, if she has such, or her toleration of my attention, may be a whim, and a whim only; but, with all her father's regard for her, how would he view even that passing fancy?"

And Lennard smiled bitterly to himself.

He heard a light step—a shadow fell across him, and he found two bright and beautiful eyes bent with a quizzical expression on his own, as a tall and very handsome girl stood beside him, with the bird-of-paradise plume in her smart hat dancing in the wind, while she twirled with a rapid little hand the parasol that rested on her plump and rounded shoulder.

A large and showy girl, with a creamy complexion and rich colour, a nose *retroussé* in the slightest degree, bright brown eyes and soft brown hair, full red lips that were rather large, perhaps, and a general complexion and expression of great brilliance; she was Hesbia Vere, dressed in a most becoming summer-suit of plain Holland linen trimmed with blue braid; but her gloves, boots, collar, brooch, and earrings were all in admirable taste.

"Miss Vere!" exclaimed Lennard, as he sprang to his feet; "I beg pardon for not seeing you approach."

"Or hearing me either," said she; "I have been watching you for the last half-hour."

"Impossible!"

"For ten minutes—two at least. Are you composing poetry, or what?"

"Poetry!—no—but why?"

"You were muttering and talking to yourself."

"I have no one else to talk to."

"And whose fault, sir, is that pray?"

"My own perhaps, Hesbia."

"Miss Vere, say, please; we cannot play at flirtation and laughing love-making among you sobersided Scotch folks, as we may do at home."

"Play at love-making!" repeated Lennard, with mingled sadness and annoyance; "it would soon be playing with fire, if one attempted it with you."

"Oh, don't try to flatter me, please, or I may get up a beautiful blush."

"You have been too much occupied ever to think of me, poor lonely wretch, in the old house yonder," said he, offended by the levity of her bearing.

"Occupied, Mr. Blair! with what, or with whom do you mean?"

"Visitors—one visitor in particular, by all accounts."

"I am watched, then, it seems, though I am accountable for my conduct to no one but papa. But now, don't become disagreeable," she added, with one of her brightest and most tender smiles, as she took his arm uninvited; "come with me for a little walk, and I shall tell you why I actually was about to visit Oakwoodlee."

"You were coming to visit me, Hesbia?"

"No, Lennard—but, for the future, remember that I am Miss Vere, and you Mr. Blair—I was going but to leave my own note in passing—this, an invitation for you to dine with us on the day after to-morrow, at six o'clock—you'll come, of course."

"With pleasure," said Lennard; and then he added, gloomily, "I suppose I must."

"Must? Oh, fie! jealous again—poor Lennard—I beg pardon, Mr. Blair, I mean; why, the gentleman you are thinking of is only my cousin."

"Your cousin a baronet?"

"A baronet—my cousin Travice; Mr. Blair, what are you talking about?" she asked, with a flush of irritation; "but don't be so jealous, I implore you," she added, with one of her sweet waggish smiles.

"Oh, Hesbia, that I had the right to be!"

"Men can be jealous whether they have the right or not."

"There can be no jealousy without love," said the young man in a tremulous voice, and in a manner there could be no mistaking.

"You are in error," said Miss Vere, parrying the speech,

or unheeding its inference; "jealousy may exist with perfect hatred. My cousin and I are together in a dull country house; he compliments my singing, which you have often told me was excellent; he praises my seat on horseback, which you have admitted was admirable; he finds it heavy work swaying me into the saddle, which, I think, you have discovered also,—but he adjusts my foot so nicely in the stirrup! He pays me all sorts of attentions, just as you, Sir Cullender Crowdy, and a hundred others have done and may do, and yet don't mean anything. I take them for what they are worth; and every pretty girl—you too have admitted that I am pretty, Lennard—does precisely the same."

Lennard sighed. Borne away by her rattling manner, and bewildered by the strange charm of her presence and her brilliant beauty, he pressed against his side the hand that rested on his arm, and half thought the pressure was returned upon it; but Hesbia was too subtle in her coquetry to do a very decided thing.

At intervals Lennard had heard of this cousin Travice Cheatwood, but never for good, and always for evil and mischief. He had heard of Hesbia being frequently with him at public places in Liverpool, but singularly enough, he and Travice had never met. He afterwards found that when he had received certain hints of engagements, or more plainly that he was *not* to visit Mr. Vere's villa near Aigburth, on particular evenings, they were invariably the occasions on which "Cousin Travice" was expected!

The memory of those suspicions came back to Lennard's mind unpleasantly now.

Latterly, for some extravagance in his career at college, Travice Cheatwood had been completely banished from his uncle's family circle, so that it was a source of extreme annoyance to Lennard, his being domiciled at Blairavon now.

"Still pouting, Mr. Blair? Well, I shall call you Lennard, if by so doing I can smooth your wrinkled front. Let us be as good friends here as we usually are at Liverpool, for there I always find you charming. I am wilful, naughty, tiresome——"

"Hesbia?"

"Yes, tiresome at times; but you will find me charming, too, for all that; and, like myself, you have rather an aptitude for fun and flirting."

"I am in no mood for fun."

"Of course not, just now, my poor friend."

"And as for flirting, you are the last girl in the world with whom I would ever think of doing so."

"The last—I—why?" she asked, with real surprise and inquiry in her clear, deep hazel eyes.

His voice trembled as he spoke, and the colour deepened in the cheek of Miss Vere, while gratified vanity flashed in her eyes; then her heavy lids drooped, and she said, with a merry laugh,

"I shall not seek to lure you into danger; so come, don't let us grow serious, for you know how I detest serious people; and in the country for you and I to become so would be equally unbearable and absurd."

Lennard sighed with real annoyance at the hopeless or studied frivolity of her manner, as they walked slowly onward through a shady and grassy lane.

There are some persons in the world who are said to love whoever, or rather whatever, they pity. Hesbia for the time was one of these, and in reality at that moment—though an egregious flirt—she felt that she actually loved the sad-eyed and lonely Lennard Blair of that broken home, that desolate old house at Oakwoodlee; but she would have shrunk nervously from affording him the slightest inkling as to this temporary state of her thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

HESBIA VERE.

THE beauty of Hesbia Vere was certainly great and striking; but though perfectly English in its character, dangerous in its quality, sparkling and brilliant, it was not aristocratic. She had a remarkable bearing; but it was the confidence derived from a consummate knowledge of the possession of that beauty and the admiration it excited, combined with wealth and utter freedom of thought and action.

The county dames declared that Miss Vere was not ladylike, yet admitted her attractions, while the gentlemen averred that she was decidedly a "stylish girl," and that phrase expressed all.

She had a singular fascination in the brightness of her smile, in the modulation of her voice, and in all her ways, particularly in a charming playfulness of manner; yet she was in heart and soul a coquette. A year or so younger than Lennard Blair, she was more than ten years his senior in experience of life in many of its phases.

Hesbia had little love for the country in general, and none for Blairavon in particular. She rather liked the idea of

"papa having a place in Scotland," because the Queen had made the possession of such a retreat fashionable, and it gave her something to talk about in Liverpool. She certainly liked the somewhat baronial aspect of the old manor-house, especially when it was full of visitors; but she hated the people around, for the old county families looked coldly on "the parvenus" at races and elsewhere. The ladies, she thought, were barely polite—almost insolent—to her, though her appearance, style of dress, her carriage, grooms and horses, were all certainly in most respects second to none that the three Lothians could produce.

The county dames disliked Hesbia Vere not the less that their sons and husbands both liked and admired her; for the girl was artful, and a student in the art of attracting attention to the most minute degree. She knew exactly when and how to look, to smile, and to blush; how to leave a sentence unfinished, so as to give it double power or meaning; to droop her fine eyelids and then look up with soft or tender and childlike enquiry or with a bold and flashing glance; to play with her rippling hair or her gloves; to let her tiny foot, in its marvellous kid boot, peep out precisely at the proper time; and she knew well when to adopt the tones of playful reproach, of gentle pleading, and of most singular pathos.

Bright and beautiful—most beautiful—were those soft brown eyes of Hesbia Vere; but, strange to say, their smiles were neither pure nor holy. Cast together in the country with such a girl as this, after their first intimacy,—a girl with such a singular amount of individuality in her character and bearing,—poor Lennard Blair was certain to be helplessly lost.

Clasping her gloved hands upon his arm for a moment, she said,—

"Though glad to see you now, Mr. Blair, I must deplore the sad event which so suddenly brought you hither."

"And I have to thank you for many a kind visit to the poor old gentleman before it took place."

"I dare say you long expected it?"

"Yes—but when it did come——"

"Ah, of course—yes, yes—we know all that," interrupted Hesbia, whose mind had no turn for grave thoughts; "but I am glad you have come to lighten the days of my—own banishment, for such I consider life here."

"Even in the sweet season of summer?"

"Even in summer," she said, as they paused.

Two pretty hands cased in Houbigant's softest kids were

playing with his Albert chain and the charms that dangled thereat. The position had its charm, and the moment was opportune, though he dared not attempt to make more of it; the very land he looked on, the giant elms overhead, no longer his own, but *hers*, somehow forbade it.

"Yes, I weary here," she resumed, as they again walked onward; "but we have got a delightful box of books from Mudie's. Shall I send you over some?"

"Thanks; but I am sick of books, and while here would rather ramble on the green hill-slopes or in the leafy woods."

"How romantic! you are surely very much in love——"

"In love—oh, Hesbia!" he began impetuously.

"Yes—with Nature. My cousin Travice was to meet me here at the end of the Willow Loan, as you Scotch people queerly call it, but I see nothing of him."

Lennard's countenance fell, and without perceiving this,—for she was scanning all the neighbouring fields and the sunny landscape,—Hesbia resumed:

"What do you think Travice said about my foot, Mr. Blair?"

"That it is very handsome, of course."

"Yes; and that if I will lend him a shoe, he will fill it with champagne and drain it before all the gentlemen at the first hunting dinner."

"A fool!"

"Fie! he is only my cousin; and what cousins say or do can matter little." And as she spoke she smiled from under one of the daintiest parasols that ever shaded two bright coquettish eyes from the glare of a brilliant sun. "You must learn to master your piques, or they may master you."

"In many ways I am not my own master, and in more I am a slave!" said Lennard, with a sudden gush of bitterness; "and so there are times when I find the duty of obedience somewhat of a task, and rail at fortune."

"We are all subordinate or inferior to some one in this world, Mr. Blair," replied Hesbia rather sententiously.

"True."

"But you talk oddly of duty, of obedience, of fortune: are you not a partner in papa's firm?"

"Yes; but to so small an amount that I am scarcely recognised as such, especially on 'Change; and am nevertheless obliged to be your papa's most obedient servant for the sum of two hundred pounds or so per annum. Of course he pays his butler an equal sum."

"Lennard Blair, do you not know that you are becoming very unpleasant?"

"Hesbia!"

"And positively quarrelling with me," she exclaimed, and her half-closed eyes glittered with pleasure rather than perplexity, for she saw that he was inspired by a jealousy of her cousin Cheatwood.

"I am not quarrelling with you, Miss Vere; nothing surely could be further from my mind, though there was a momentary bitterness in it."

"Why?"

"I was strangely brought up, Miss Vere;" said Lennard colouring, "and I was taught to think very differently from your city-bred boys, who are generally thoroughly practical, and not apt to cherish illusions."

"I understand—oh, yes! I know that your papa, poor man! always despised mine, because he had made his money in trade."

"Despise?"

"Yes."

"Ah, do not use a term so harsh."

"It was exceedingly behind the age, such a sentiment: but I know, too, that he actually hated him, simply because papa had acquired by purchase the lands and estate which he had not the prudence to preserve for himself, and, more than all, for you."

"Ah, had he but done so," Lennard was beginning with a glance of tender meaning, when she again interrupted him by saying, rapidly,—

"All this was not just; but the truth is, Mr. Blair, that our country gentlemen and great landholders, if not politicians, farmers, breeders of fat pigs and great poultry, or something of the kind, fall into foolish or vicious habits, and lose that on which so many set a store—their landed estates; their 'dirty acres,' as they are so fond of terming them."

The dark expression which had been gathering on Lennard's face deepened, when Hesbia sharply withdrew her arm from his, on the sudden approach of a gentleman who came slowly sauntering along the footpath, and whom she introduced to Lennard as her cousin, Mr. Travice Cheatwood.

They bowed, lifted their hats, and rather coldly surveyed each other; for Mr. Cheatwood proved to be his companion of the night express—the cool, impudent, and intrusive passenger from Liverpool; and now there was the old supercilious smile on his lips, but none in his eyes, as he coaxed his fair moustache and long goatee-beard, and said,—

"How d'ye do, Mr. Blair? Glad to see you, to make your acquaintance. Happy 'm sure."

"We have met before."

"Ah, yes—of course. In the Liverpool train I think it was."

"We begun rather unpleasantly."

"Let bygones be bygones. I think you a thoroughly good fellow," said Cheatwood, presenting his hand, which Lennard shook; and, as he did so, he could see that though there was frankness in the words there was none in the manner of the speaker, in whose cold grey eyes he read an expression of concealed dislike, if not hostility, which led him to feel that an enemy was before him; for, through Hesbia's art, she had contrived to excite her cousin's jealousy of their friendship.

"And now that I have met Mr. Cheatwood, I shall not trespass further on your time, or lure you further from home, Mr. Blair," said Hesbia; "but how, are you alone, Travice? I thought the baronet was with you."

"Luckily I contrived to give him and that little lawyer fellow, Dabchick, the slip in the coppice, and come here without them."

"And why were you so long coming?"

"You wearied for me?" said he gaily.

"You flatter yourself—absurd! No such thing! But why I say?"

"Because an old muff in a livery coat, whom I met herding a cob, scarcely understood me when I inquired the way to Mr. Blair's diggings, which people hereabout call Aikwudlee it seems. Out of London, I find it is all Scotch, or some such dialect that no fellow can understand."

"Travice!" exclaimed Hesbia, reddening, for she felt that her cousin's tone was brusque and offensive, and knew that the "muff" referred to, was poor old Steinie, who had been attentively grazing his dead master's pony. "Then Mr. Blair," she added, presenting her hand, "you will dine with us on the day after to-morrow. It is no party, remember; of course, how could it be, on a two days' invitation—only ourselves and Lady Foster, whom you will find charming, though a sad woman, who never flirts, like me."

"I shall be most happy; I need not write?"

"Not unless you wish to have the pleasure of inditing the tiniest and pinkest of notes to me—ta, ta—good bye."

And kissing her hand with a bright glance, swiftly shot—but concealed from the watchful Travice, by the skilful mode in which she managed her parasol—a glance full of

hidden meaning to Lennard, she took her cousin's arm, patting it with a gentle pressure, and swept away.

The parting glance, with all its brightness and meaning fondness, failed, however, to reassure Lennard Blair.

Why, thought he, did she with such nervous haste withdraw her arm from his arm, on this cousin's approach?

"The birds of the air, the beasts of the field, the fishes of the sea have their instincts, and man has his." So by a mysterious intuition—some instinct swift as thought or light—Lennard felt that while he hated this man, he was in turn hated, and that Travice Cheatwood was doomed to be his bane, his enemy. He could not account for this intuitive and mutual antipathy, but he read the certainty in the cold keen eye of Cheatwood, and heard it in the tone of his voice. It was the old aphorism of Dr. Fell realised, and he felt like Romeo,—

> "My mind misgives,
> Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
> Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
> With this night's revels.

So this was the Travice Cheatwood of whom he had so often heard among the clerks in Canning Place as a blackleg, gambler, and tabooed jockey, whose life since boyhood had been a career of shrewd betting, sharp gambling, horse-racing, cock-fighting, frequenting casinos, billiard rooms, hells, and haunts of "the Fancy," with every species of low dissipation. He was the only nephew of Mr. Vere, and son of the late Mr. Cheatwood, whose share in the business had long since been bought up, though the name was retained in the firm, as it had been an old-established one in Liverpool, and was thought to sound well; for more than thirty years no name was better known on 'Change than "old Cheat," as he was named by his cotemporaries.

A reckless fortune-hunting cousin, passably good-looking, profoundly confident too, with a consummate knowledge of the world—Lennard's jealousy was roused to fever heat!

He knew that he had left Hesbia in dangerous hands, and the knowledge of her notorious propensity for flirtation, with the freedom of intercourse, the facilities afforded by their relationship and mutual residence in a large old rambling house like Blairavon, made him feel that he was on the eve of losing her for ever, if indeed he had not lost her already.

CHAPTER IX.

DOCTOR FEVERLEY.

An implied but undeclared lover—an understood but an unaccepted one, unaccepted in any other sense than as a species of privileged angler, Lennard Blair felt all the doubts and miseries of his position most keenly now, and resolved that he would, if possible, end them on the evening of the dinner at Blairavon ; and that if all hope failed him, then he should start at once for Liverpool. Indeed, he did not see very well how he could remain away much longer from his desk in Canning Place, and there was little doubt of Mr. Vere taking the first opportunity of giving a pretty pointed hint to that effect.

On the day subsequent to the interview just narrated, Elsie Graham summoned him to the dining-room windows, to see a cavalcade which swept on horseback along the road by Craigellon. There were Hesbia Vere, and another lady, attended by several gentlemen, among whom the old servant indicated the baronet, who seemed to be a tall, thin, ungainly man, Travice Cheatwood, and one or two others, adding,—

" Your father, poor man, Mr. Lennard, used to say that in her saddle Miss Vere had the worst seat of any lady in the county ; and all the county kent how good a judge *he* was of such things. Set her up, indeed, wi' her laces and braws ! But truly, as the Scriptures say, 'pride goeth before destruction.'"

All day Lennard had been conning, sorting or burning old letters and family papers, the cares and correspondence of the dead—mouldy and dusty relics of affections that have passed away—old mementos of a thousand kindly descriptions were there, among flue and cobwebs, in the drawers of his father's escritoire ; antique trinkets and locks of hair—mute symbols of hearts that once were faithful, passionate, and true ; a broken fan, a glove rolled in tissue-paper, a silver pomander ball, with its secret and forgotten story.

Pell-mell among farriery and veterinary bills, and racing memoranda of Richard Blair's plumy days, cuttings from *Bell's Life* of hunting meets and so forth, were many letters of his uncle Lennard, written home when a boy at school or a student at college, and there were letters, too, which to the present Lennard seemed faded and old, yellow and strange, for they were those of his parents in the days of their courtship.

Would children yet unborn, in the days of after years, be looking with the same melancholy interest over the letters of himself and—well, yes, Hesbia Vere?

So he closed the escritoire, and began to ponder over his position again.

Often, as on the preceding day, had he trembled on the verge of a declaration, which was perhaps expeeted; but he shrunk from the attempt with an emotion of pride that mingled with a nervous timidity of ridicule or rejection. And *now*, for all that he knew to the contrary, some one of those guests who were at Blairavon—the dapper little lawyer, who bore the absurd name of Dabehiek; the baronet, who was half suspectcd of being an adventurer; or Travice Cheatwood, who was both adventurer and knave,—might be crossing the rubicon and making the wealthy flirt his own. So, "tide what may," Lennard resolved that the evening of the dinner should, if possible, end all his troubles, and place their intimacy on a more defined basis, or destroy it altogether.

Anything was better than this painful uncertainty.

Seated at a window of the dining-room overlooking the little garden where old Steinie, who usually filled up his leisure time there, was raking and trimming, Lennard Blair had just come to this satisfactory state of determination, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and the cheerful voice of Doctor Feverley said—

"Still mooning, Blair. Come, rouse yourself, my friend; I have some news for you."

"News—of what?"

"I am to dine at Blairavon, and you too, my note mentions. Miss Vere adds that in a postscript, where ladies have the reputation of referring to that which is uppermost in their thoughts," Doctor Feverley continued.

"Your presence will certainly add to my pleasure."

"Who else are going; do you know?" asked Feverlcy, who had always an eye to praetiee.

"None but their visitors, Miss Vere said."

"Ah! you have seen her, then?"

"She brought me her own notc."

"Ah!" and Feverlcy paused with a quizzieal expression of eye. "I feel dull this evening; have been worried all day with two bad cases at the colliery village; a miner's head terribly contused by a fall in the great pit, and another of fracture through the condyles of the humerus, so I have just dropped in to smoke a pipe with you, thinking you might be lonely."

Now, Steinie Hislop who, on seeing the Doctor arrive had hastened from the garden and assumed his shabby old livery coat, to act a new part, appeared in the room, and, unordered, brought the decanters of port and sherry to the table, just as had been his wont in the old Laird's time, when Cheyne of the Haughs or any other visitor dropped in; and Feverley being, as he said, low spirited, did not require much pressure to help himself to a glass of the fine old madeira, which had been for years in its cobwebby bin—one of the chief treasures of Richard Blair's diminished household and curtailed luxuries.

Though the "Vere set" were not the most distinguished in the county, the invitation to dine at Blairavon had been to poor Doctor Feverley a source of much real pleasure and satisfaction. Mr. Vere had been one of the two or three grand parochial patrons who occasionally employed him to physic their servants, or even a child or so in some very mild case indeed; for in every serious one, though Feverley was a very clever fellow, metropolitan skill was alone relied on; but here had come a special invitation to a friendly and family dinner.

It made the poor and modest young fellow as happy almost as a young girl going to her first ball; and even now his affectionate old mother—her face radiant with pleasure—was busy in preparing, with her own tremulous hands, one of three dress shirts of which her son's thrifty wardrobe could boast.

Perceiving that, in his flow of spirits, the Doctor was disposed to rally him about Hesbia Vere, Lennard prepared at once to turn the tables on him.

"There is a Lady Foster—a very pretty woman, she would seem—residing at Blairavon," said the Doctor.

"And rich, no doubt. Won't you try your luck, Feverley?"

"What, I—a poor dispensary doctor?"

"Why not? you are just the very man. Let us see; the 'inconsolable affliction of a widow of twenty, besieged by a lover of thirty,' that is about your mark, Feverley."

"How you run on, Blair; you forget that, unfortunately, there is a barrier."

"A canonical one?"

"Rather," said the Doctor, curtly. "The lady has a husband."

"By Jove! I thought she was a widow from the way Hesbia——"

"Who?"

"Miss Vere, I mean, spoke of her as being a sad little woman, who never flirted, and so forth."

"I have not met with either her or her husband. They have just arrived at Blairavon on a visit, and appear to be total strangers in this part of Scotland."

"Well, apart from her, I think a wife would be a great advantage to a parochial medical man. It is a recommendation for an extended practice, to be married, isn't it, Feverley?"

Feverley sighed and shook his head, while a gloomy expression came over his usually open and cheerful face.

"My exchequer is not a flourishing one, and the mineral well is a severe opposition to its increase. I have my mother—dear old soul!—to attend to my wants, while I attend to hers, and I am as happy as—as——"

"A king," suggested Lennard.

"Happier than some kings, perhaps, for I am now perfectly content."

"But marriage——"

"Don't talk of it, I pray you! I was once nearly trying my luck that way, but I shall never, never do so again."

"The bottle stands with you."

"Thanks," said Feverley, helping himself.

"Did the lady jilt you?"

"No."

"Poor Feverley—she died then?"

"No."

"She married another?"

"No."

"What on earth happened?" asked Lennard, with growing surprise.

"Another married her."

"What difference does that make?"

"Not much to the ear, perhaps; but there is a great difference in the sense," replied Feverley, as he drained his glass of wine, to fill and inadvertently empty it again, as if to drown some unpleasant thought. "In many ways I have endured much in my time Blair; yet I am not many years older than yourself, being barely thirty; but there have been hours when, in the bitterness of my heart, the lines of Milton occurred, and his words rose to my lips,—

"'Did I request the maker from the clay
To form me man?'

and when I have asked of myself, why I was born into the world, and for what purpose?"

"And was a love-affair the cause of this?"

"A love-affair, but one full of profound sorrow, suffering, and wrong—yea, and sin too," said Feverley, in a broken voice, while covering his face with his hands, though the twilight had deepened so much that the wainscoted dining-room was almost dark, and the grove of Scottish firs without stood like giant trees of bronze against the ruby and amber-coloured sky of the west.

"It seems hard for you here, to have a life of loneliness before you," said Lennard, after a pause.

"Not Venus herself could tempt me into matrimony now," replied Feverley, with energy; "it would seem but a second marriage in which I could offer only the mockery of love—all freshness of feeling having passed out of me."

There was a considerable pathos in the voice of the young Doctor; and Lennard, circumstanced as he was with Hesbia Vere, felt a kindred chord vibrate keenly in his breast.

"Feverley," said he, "I beg your pardon, if, by a heedless jest or thoughtless question, I have brought a forgotten sorrow back to memory."

"Forgotten—oh, it can never be forgotten! But how could you know what you had probed?"—he breathed quickly as he spoke—"how could you see the shadow that has been thrown upon my life, or the dear memory that is enthroned in my inner heart, and shall never pass from thence but with my life?" continued Feverley.

Lennard was sincerely grieved for the emotion he had excited; and therefore, to draw the Doctor from his sad thoughts, he spoke of the dark story of his uncle Lennard: of his being found in the lochlet at Craigellon, on the alleged unlucky day of the family; of his own great secret—his love for Hesbia Vere, his fears, and doubts of its success, and so forth.

"But she whom I loved and who loved me so well—too well, perhaps—was a very different girl from Hesbia Vere," said Feverley, bluntly.

"Different?" said Lennard, not quite liking something in the Doctor's tone.

"Ah, yes; Mildred Montgomerie was altogether another style of girl."

"In appearance?"

"In face and stature, in manner and bearing. Miss Vere has the reputation of being a beautiful coquette—whether justly so, I know not; she is a brilliant and sparkling girl, with admirers ever by her side; but she that I—I loved was a soft and tender, a fragile and gentle girl, as unlike

Hesbia Vere as a modest little violet differs from a full-blown moss-rose."

There was something still more unpleasing in this speech to Lennard, but he knew not what to say; and now, after a pause, Feverley, who, under the influence of the wine, good fellowship, and a real liking for Lennard Blair, had been seized by one of those fits of communicativeness which possess all frank fellows at times, said,—

"I'll tell you my story, Blair, and how it came to pass that I am but a poor country practitioner, content to vegetate here at Blairavon; and when you have heard it, I shall be surprised if you do not think my love-affair was a very sad one."

So what the young Doctor related deserves, at least, an entire chapter to itself.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUSIN LOVERS.

My father was, like myself, a medical man, and though, like myself, he wrote the honourable letters M.D., F.R.C.P.E. after his name, he had a difficulty in procuring a lucrative practice; and, having married early a Miss Montgomerie, the pretty sister of a brother student, he was fain to accept an appointment in Jamaica, and there I was born, in the land of sugar, coffee, cotton, and the yellow fever.

I was one of five children, but the sole survivor; as the rest of the little brood perished in succession, of ailments peculiar to the island; so I was sent home to be reared and educated by my maternal uncle, whose residence, Monkwood Moat, is an old baronial place of the Scottish and English fighting times, situated in a beautiful part of the Merse.

Though young Montgomerie of the Moat never forgave his sister for marrying the poor medical practitioner who had been his friend at their old Alma Mater, and with whom he had chummed for years, and "ground" together for many a weary night, he could scarcely decline to receive her son, the poor little boy whom she had named Frank in honour of him, and who had come so far to avoid the pests of which his brothers and sisters perished.

My uncle, Frank Montgomerie, was not a wealthy man; he had not taken high degrees at college, and he too had made a poor marriage; but then his wife was a daughter of one of the best families on the Scottish Border, for he was

a man who, like the late Mr. Blair, set prodigious store upon crests and mottoes, on name, heraldic honours, and so forth; and, being vain of his descent from the Montgomeries of Skelmorlie and Eglinton, had learned to look with lofty contempt upon his sister's husband, the poor doctor who was broiling among planters, niggers, and maroons in Jamaica, and who could only boast of the common pedigree of all, from that respectable old kitchen gardener who handled his spade in Eden.

If his marriage had been a high one, it had neither proved lucrative nor happy. His wife was much of an invalid, and died in giving birth to their only child, a daughter named after her, Mildred Home Montgomerie, and since that event my uncle had secluded himself in the old house at Monkwood, where he rarely saw visitors, and more rarely went abroad.

So there were we, the cousins, a boy and girl—I a year or so older than Milly—the only source of noise, merriment, or smiles in the lonely old house, which was to be, for an indefinite period, my home. We soon learned to love each other as brother and sister, or something of that kind; not that any one taught us to do so, for we required no artificial tutelage; it came to us naturally, this child-like love—this sentiment of mutual regard and endearment.

Though somewhat cold in his manner, Uncle Frank was always kind to me, and would often smile kindly when he saw me playing about in the same rooms and places where his sister—now far, far away—had lived her happy girl life.

Happy, happy were those years of my boyhood at the old house of Monkwood, in the companionship of that sweet cousin Milly!

The mansion-house is situated amid the most beautiful portion of the Merse, some miles inland from its coast of rocky precipices, and under the shadow of Clinthill, the highest peak of the lovely Lammermuir range.

I shall never see it more, for never again could I look on the old Moat of Monkwood; yet in all its features and details the beloved place comes vividly before me, with its half-castellated outline, and a turret or two roofed with grey stone, peeping up above the chesnut groves.

Around it are silent tarns or lochlets—remnants they may be of the vast marsh from which the county took its ancient name—with masses of water-lilies floating on the surface, and islets of bulrushes where the coot and heron linger. Dark clumps of old forest, too, are there, such as that round the Hair-stane Rig, varying the great expanse of green

pasture land, or the upland slopes, where, when the lapwing comes, the harbinger of spring, the young grain first begins to sprout, and where it first ripens into golden yellow, in the early harvest time.

In the heats of summer we found plenty of shady places wherein to lurk amid the old forest trees, or the groves of drooping willows, by the little lakes where we were never weary of wandering in quest of childish adventures, or of nuts, berries, and butterflies; or setting lilies or harebells afloat upon the mountain-burn that came brawling from whence and to where we knew not, though it was only flowing from the green slopes of the Lammermuirs towards the German sea.

Happy times were those; we had the same tutor, the same tasks, the same occupations, and the same amusements. Milly never grew weary of them; neither did I; nor did we ever weary of each other.

Milly was a rosy, laughing girl then—the picture of a joyous, blooming Hebe; her dark eyes sparkling with health and happiness, and her dark hair falling in a cascade about her ivory neck and shoulders.

A little time—you may foresee the period that was coming—and we would sit silent for hours, while I played with that dark silky hair, and heaved strange sighs in my heart, and felt deep unuttered thoughts of—I scarcely knew what. But childhood was passing away, an older phase of existence followed it, and we were beginning to wake from our dream that all the world was contained in Monkwood Moat, and that the hemisphere was bounded by the Lammermuirs and the Frith of Forth; and so were launching into a newer, a more delicious, but dangerous dream of life, that made each, and each only, all the world to the other.

I was sixteen when my West-Indian remittances began to fail; my uncle Montgomerie cared little for that; but one morning a letter arrived with a seal and edging of black.

My father, whose face and figure were little more than a vague and dreamy memory now, was dead!

Over-worked in his practice when the cholera had broken out, he had died at his post in a great public hospital, and my mother was left in such meagre circumstances that she resolved not to return home until she had realized some money or property my father had, or was to have had, and so forth—I never could make it out exactly; but for five years she remained in Jamaica battling with the law courts in the hope of achieving this realization, and prior to her return many changes had taken place with me.

By the time this crash came, I had learned to love my cousin Mildred with all the strength and depth of an enthusiastic and imaginative boy's first passion, and certainly her beauty was calculated to inspire it. By the time she was eighteen, much of the girlish bloom of her hoydenish days had been toned down, or changed in character. Her face was small, pale, and colourless, very white and pure, for somewhat of her mother's delicacy had descended to her, and the transparent cheek would flush upon the least excitement. She had marvellously delicate and minute features, eyes of the softest and deepest violet, with lashes of wondrous length, that imparted to her face a charming expression of modesty and gentleness.

Her figure was, perhaps, somewhat too *petite*. She was timid among strangers, though we rarely saw any at Monkwood, and she seemed to cling with confidence only to me, for her father's manner was more repelling than prepossessing; yet he was intensely vain of her beauty, and of the delicate form of her hands, feet, and ears, which were, he would pompously say, "such models of perfection as could only come of the blood of the Montgomeries of Skelmorlie and Eglinton."

We had learned to know that we were no longer children, and had become lovers, when the time so dreaded arrived that I had to choose a line in life—a profession, an occupation. Like other boys I had my visions of soldiering, of sailoring, and of having, like Robinson Crusoe, a snug little island of my own, with Milly as a companion in lieu of Friday; but those schoolday whims were past now, and so I resolved to adopt an avocation which has ever led the van in all works of charity and benevolence—and nowhere more nobly than in our native Scotland—the practice of medicine, and to be, as my poor father had been before me, a doctor.

So sweet Milly Montgomerie and I were to be separated at last!

I remember the time when our airy bubble burst—when the fairy palace in which we had been dwelling passed away like that of Aladdin, and our first real sorrow came upon us.

Summer had come. Over the green braes and upland slopes the old limes and chesnut-trees were casting their deepest shadows; the white water-lilies and the dusky coots were floating on the lovely blue tarns; the wild flowers and the guelder-roses bloomed beside the old deep-rutted roads, where, in other times, many an English beeve

and hirsel had been goaded northward by the wild moss-troopers.

The atmosphere was laden with all the rich odours of the season, and all nature around Monkwood Moat looked as it ever did in its summer beauty and the sun shone as brightly, but the hearts of Milly and I were sad.

"You know, Milly darling," said I—for the theme of the sweet relationship, the more tender tie that was to be one day between us, had long since been exhausted—"that I have now learned to deplore the want of some useful profession, which would render me—I should say us, dearie—*us* independent."

"But what need have you of a profession, or for slaving at college to learn one?" she asked impetuously.

"All men do something for their livelihood, Milly."

"All men who are poor."

"And am I rich?" I asked, sadly.

"You have me," she replied, laying her head upon my shoulder; and I covered her little face with kisses. "Listen to me, Frank," she resumed, after a pause; "we have Monkwood Moat—at least papa has—and is not that quite the same?"

"I fear he does not think so—and certainly never would if he knew all. In his heart, and in his strange antiquated ideas, he despises the name and blood I inherit from my poor father, and has repeatedly hinted that I should push my way in India, under the patronage of his friend Mr. Wharton, or in some of the distant colonies."

"No—no—no! this is not to be thought of for a moment. Here have we stayed for years, and here shall we ever stay, dear Frank; yes, all the days of our lives, as the story-books say, and watch papa as he grows old. It will do him good to see us; oh, so happy, as we shall always be!"

This scheme was not an impossible or unpleasing one; but our fate was not in our own hands. Uncle Montgomerie had detected enough to make him resolve on our immediate separation; and long after that dread time came to pass, it was my delight, when alone, to turn the soul inward, and live over and over again the last interview we had together, and to treasure the words and the wishes of my generous and guileless cousin Milly.

He had seen enough, I say, to bring about my immediate departure for Edinburgh, as he had other views concerning his daughter, whom he was actually reserving as a wife for his friend Judge Wharton, who was returning from India

with wealth that was reputed to be enormous ; and though he made me a tolerably handsome allowance for my maintenance at college, he proved in the end, the true melodramatic father with a "flinty heart." Sternly he said to Milly,—

"Too long has Monkwood been a scene of fooling for a moonstruck youth, with a spasmodic attack of the tender passion for a silly girl who is barely past that age when every damsel fancies herself in love with her music-master, however stout, old, or married the man may be ; and I have sworn," he added, "that though the nameless beggar, Feverley, stole my sister, the beggar's son shall not add to the injury by stealing my daughter!"

These were bitter words ; and when they were communicated to me in a letter from my poor mother—who was still lingering in Jamaica after that imaginary property, for my behoof rather than her own—they sank deeply and sorrowfully into my heart.

However, I knew nothing of my uncle's mood of mind ; and looking forward only to college vacation, when I should be free to rush back to Milly and the happiness of Monkwood Moat, I matriculated at Edinburgh in October, and became one of the most energetic of the many medical students at the *Academia Jacobi VI. Scotorum Regis ;* on the grand deep archways, the stately Doric columns, and the vast and silent quadrangle of which I was wont to gaze with something of profound respect—aye, and love too ; for there on its balustraded terraces, and amid the hum of those lofty and crowded class-rooms, had my father, in all the hope and ardour of youth, studied and toiled before me ; and now he was lying, the victim of his professional enthusiasm, far away in a West-Indian grave.

Self-conceit, the curse of your provincial Scotsman and Englishman too, was not, perhaps, my greatest peril ; though I could not believe myself to be quite the paragon my mother thought me in childhood, and Cousin Milly, during the happy years at Monkwood Moat.

I remember that, on the very day I matriculated, I gave a jeweller in Princes Street a lock of Milly's dark hair to put in a pretty locket for me. Whether the trinket I selected was too small, or that I was rash in leaving the treasured tress with him, I know not now ; but on receiving back the lock, it was severed, cut in *two ;* and then a dim foreboding came over me that something of evil to our love would happen, and little more than boy though I was, I trembled in my heart. Was this a weakness, or an intuition of the future?

God only knows.

From that day forward, I plunged deep into study, into hard reading, and attendance at the classes for the preliminary examination in arts. It was some time before disgust in the dissecting-room was mastered by curiosity, enthusiasm, and a genuine wonder at the marvels of Nature. I had a chum who read with me, and we ground each other up in everything that has been published of late years, from "Fyfe's Anatomy," and "Bell, on the Bones," to the seventh edition of "Quain's Elements."

Milly and I corresponded in secret, through the medium of the village post-office ; and we both looked forward impatiently to the vacation time, which came in due course ; but brought with it a letter from my uncle, informing me that I was to spend the period between it and returning to my studies either in Edinburgh or at Monkwood as I chose ; but if at the latter I should be alone, as he and Milly were to pass that portion of the year in the south of England.

This was a shock and a disappointment on which I had not calculated. To linger on in Edinburgh amid the dust of its hot and empty streets in summer was galling in the extreme ; but still more galling would it be to go back to lonely Monkwood House, where—Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory had departed !—Milly was no longer there. So I remained in our northern metropolis, a dreary residence for a total stranger.

But the summer passed, and brown autumn came with its studies and its work, and I made the most rapid progress at the university.

My uncle now fairly gave me to understand, when one day I met him in town, that for the future—at least until I passed and graduated—I was *not* to present myself at Monkwood. I understood completely what that meant, and from that moment there was a species of secret warfare maintained between us.

I know that I was in error and to blame for acting as I had done, but the love of Milly blinded me to every scruple, and on every occasion in which I could spare time, I took the rail for Berwickshire, and contrived to have many a tender and delicious interview with her, unknown to all save ourselves, at our old haunts, by the tarns where the lilies floated and the wild ducks squatted among the bulrushes, by the burn that gurgled under its hawthorn bowers from the Lammermuirs towards the sea, by the Hair-stane Rig, where the men of the Merse held their battle trysts of old, and in the deep dark groves of Monkwood.

We had but one hope, that when I graduated, I should be more thoroughly my own master, and then we should be married; and each time that I left her, with her tears and kisses lingering on my cheek, I returned to the drudgery of study with fresher ardour, thinking only of the happiness that awaited me when the term of probation was complete; when I could write the magical letters "M.D." after my name, and my gentle, delicate, and ladylike Milly would take upon herself the vows of a wife, and, more than ever, be all the world to me.

These hopes and fears kept me safely amid all the dissipations and follies incidental to a student's life at the great Scottish university; and erelong I had but one session to pass before my final examination.

I can well remember the terrors of the preliminary, though the most simple one; from "writing an account extending to not more than two pages," of my usual place of residence (in which I accurately described Monkwood, not omitting cousin Milly, to the great amusement of the professors), on through Latin, French, and German, and so forth, till I came to chemisty and the institutes of medicine.

One morning two letters of evil import reached me; for misfortunes are said never to come alone. One was from Mildred, informing me that I had a rival in the field, in the person of her father's old friend Mr. Philip Wharton, who had been long a Sudder judge in India, a political resident at the court of his Highness the Nizam of Rumchunder Chowry, for turning whose affairs topsy-turvy till the intervention of the Company's troops became necessary, he had been made a K.S.I., and now came home with an enormous fortune.

The little cloud that was no bigger than a man's hand on our horizon, was fated to spread fast after this.

The second letter announced the return of my mother from the West Indies, broken in health and prospects, for the affair of the property (whatever it was) had turned out a total failure, and that for the future all her dependence must be on *me*.

Still I did not let my courage sink, but worked away with renewed ardour, for Milly's subsequent letters were always reassuring. Wharton, a man old enough to be her father, and yellow as a marigold, had proposed for her hand in the first week of his arrival, and, of course, had been refused; but it was evident that he and her father were in league and consultation about the matter. He had a leave of two years from India, and could give her plenty of time. Her letters,

I have said, were reassuring; yet, if too long a period passed without my receiving one, I became inspired by a natural uneasiness—a rather unreasonable jealousy.

Might it not be, I asked of myself, that the attentions of a stranger, even of a man well on in years, and the novelty thereof, with the flattering prospect of all that his wealth would afford her—the pictures he could draw of Indian luxury and Oriental splendour—might lure her to forget the boy-lover of her guileless youth, and of the pleasant days in Monkwood Moat?

In these surmises I did my beloved Mildred a cruel wrong.

And yet, with such thoughts as these to torture me at times, I had to go deep into surgery, general pathology, materia medica, and be able to explain to a nicety the differences between the cell theories of Schwann, Goodsir, and Huxley.

My small allowance had been reduced by remittances sent to my mother in Jamaica, I had contracted several petty debts in the city, and medical works, it must be remembered, are somewhat dearer than lighter literature, but I had been promised a handsome sum from Milly's father on the day I graduated; and with that promise were some unmistakable hints about the scarcity of medical men in certain colonies—anything to be handsomely rid of me, and that if I went abroad he would settle an allowance on the now penniless widow, my mother.

At last came the day of the final examination, with its consequent doubts, terrors, tremors, parched tongues, fears, and hopes, before which even those of the lover dwindle away.

I went, of course, accurately attired in black, the sombre livery of physic, law, divinity, and too often the cloak of hypocrisy and prosperous corruption in the modern Athens. My grinder had done wonders for me; he had put words in my mouth and new ideas into my head. I wrote my own thesis, however, which is more than some fellows do.

I was, somehow, very confident; I had worked hard, and my famous essay on the "Removal of a cauliflower excrescence from the brain of a Bailie of Edinburgh, by means of the galvano-caustic wire," and on the "Amputation of the *os-coccygis* of a Manx cat, without the use of chloroform," did the affair for me, and took the examiners by storm.

One ill-natured and surly professor of surgery was weak enough to dance upon my little production, and tear it to pieces before his class, as an impertinent intrusion on his own line of business; but as he had already done the same

to one of the greatest works on surgery, I consoled myself, though he pressed especially hard upon me.

Well, I passed with flying colours, and was Francis Feverley, M.D.; and that day, amid the congratulations of many poor fellows who had been "plucked," I came forth into the quadrangle. I seemed to tread on air, and felt myself several inches taller as I issued from the great archway of the college into the sunlighted and bustling thoroughfare without.

Subsequent events came so thick and fast upon me that the glories of the capping day, the 1st of August, in the old Academia Jacobi VI., when I figured in a black cloth hood, lined with crimson silk; and those of the graduating dinner, with its dissipation and fun, passed away like a dream. A jovial dinner it is too, even to be attended by those who matriculate only to throw dust in the eyes of the old folks at home, who cut the anatomical class as offensive, beyond the reach of Rimmel or aromatic vinegar, and hate the lectures as a stupid bore.

Amid the buzz and gabble round me—of Titjiens or Mario's song; of chloroform and acupressure; of splendid cases and excision of tongues, tumours and excrescences; the girls at the last assembly; of the University Eleven; the crack shot of the rifle company, the speeches, toasts, and so forth, I thought only of Monkwood and of her whose good wishes were so dearer by far than even those of the hearty fellows to whom I was about to bid farewell—for we, who for years had studied side by side in the same classrooms, were about to separate and be scattered in every land under the sun.

My health was proposed by a brother sawbones, with the earnest wish that I might "settle in a fine unhealthy locality; that after opium and calomel failed, I should always trust to nature for the rest." Handsome things were said about the cauliflower excrescence, and then the toast was drunk with all the honours amid a noisy chorus.

> "Fill ye up a brimming glass, jolly brother students;
> Toss the bumper ere it pass, jolly brother students!"

On returning to my lodgings, fagged, weary, and excited, a letter from Monkwood awaited me—but not one of gratulation on my success, information of which I had duly telegraphed. My uncle simply stated that my correspondence with Milly had been discovered; that, in consequence of my duplicity, disobedience, and ingratitude, I should not, from that hour, receive another shilling from him; that any debts I had contracted I might pay how and best I chose; and

that, on peril of something vague and terrible, I was never more to address my cousin, who was about to return again to the south of England.

This was a crusher, on the very day of my crowning success, too!

Some time elapsed before I took in the whole situation. I found myself encumbered by debts, which, though not great, were great enough for me; Milly on the eve of being carried off; my mother on her way home; my only stay gone; and I had but a few shillings in the world.

I was bewildered and benumbed by the shock, but had all the next day for reflection. It was, I remember, Sunday, which in Scotland seems as the burial-day of the past week, rather than the first of a new one. To raise money for my exigencies, I could see but one way—to take the humble situation (which a friend offered me) of surgeon of a whaler, which was to sail from Leith for the North seas in about a month; so September came, and found me still idling in Edinburgh, till a note from Milly, written too evidently under extreme agitation, reached me. It contained but a few lines, and had been dispatched in secret at a distant country post-office :—

"DEAREST, DEAREST FRANK,—

"Something terrible is about to happen to me—my father is driving me mad—yes, literally mad! Come to me instantly. Each evening after dusk, or at midnight, when all are in bed, I shall be in the arbour at the end of the garden. For Heaven's sake, dear, dear Frank, do not delay coming to meet your own brokenhearted,

"MILLY MONTGOMERIE."

The sunset of the next evening saw me looking down on Monkwood Moat and coppice, from the green slope of the Lammermuirs.

It was the season when the first leaves began to fall, and "there was a Sabbath stillness in the autumn air"—all so still indeed, that nothing seemed moving but the grey smoke that curled up from the chimneys of the house amid the brown foliage. There was no sound in the solitude, and I could almost hear the beating of my own heart.

It was one of those lovely evenings, when, as Longfellow has it—

> "There seems a beautiful spirit breathing now
> Its mellow richness on the clustered trees,
> And, from a beaker full of richest dyes,

Pouring new glory on the autumn woods,
And dipping in warm light the pillared clouds."

The memory of all the joys and hopes and happiness of the past—of our many stolen interviews, all the sweeter for being so—came welling up strongly and vividly within me, as I looked on each familiar feature of that lovely landscape, which was now before me, as I fully believed, for the last time.

The autumn evening appeared of interminable length, and the dusk as if it would never come. Slowly the shadows deepened in the russet woods, and the last rays faded from the wavy range of hills; then, leaping a wall, with which I was familiar, I made my way towards the shady old arbour in the garden.

Milly was not there, so I sat down to await her in the place where we had so often played together in childhood and met as lovers in later years. Every leaf that rustled caused me to start in expectation of her approach; but the dewy evening deepened into night without her appearing at our trysting-place. Was she ill? Had our intention been suspected? Had she been carried off? What was this terrible event that was about to happen, and of which she dared not, apparently, trust herself to write?

In torturing suspense, I watched the lights in the windows of the old house go out, as they were extinguished in succession, when the inmates retired to rest; and, ere the quaint façade of Monkwood was sunk in an obscurity and darkness that made its masses blend with the surrounding trees, I heard midnight struck by the clock of the distant village church.

With a plaid or shawl thrown loosely over her head and shoulders, Milly came softly and swiftly to join me, and threw herself hysterically on my neck and breast. The pallor on her face, as I viewed it by the starlight, terrified me; her sobs were deep and painful, while her eyes were inflamed and sparkling with combined anger and sorrow.

In a few words she told me all; that Mr. Wharton had again proposed for her hand and been accepted by her father, who was now having the marriage settlements drawn up; that she had urged in vain the disparity of years; in vain that she did not love Mr. Wharton, and never could do so, even as a friend; but resentment at me and Wharton's great wealth were incentives which rendered her father, a man at all times proud and passionate, now systematically inexorable!

She had stooped to appeal to Mr. Wharton, and in her desperation to save herself from him, had avowed her love for me, and our engagement; but this appeal was made in vain; he had only laughed and said she "would get over her girlish love in time, and when once she was in India, would forget all about it."

She would fly from the house, she told me amid her heavy sobs, but where was she to go with credit to herself? She was without money, or means, or friends who would receive her, and thus her whole dependence was on *me!*

Domestic persecution does not exist in the pages of romance alone. Here, by a studied system, it had done its worst upon poor Mildred Montgomerie; and when I told her how I was situated—that I had certainly passed as M.D., but without avail as yet; that I was now more desperate and penniless than ever, and on the eve of sailing for the Greenland seas,—her agony seemed to reach a climax.

"Oh! Frank, Frank, my sole hope, my last dependence was on you, and yet you will not take me away—you will not save me from him or from myself, and make me your wife—your wife, dearest Frank, as I have so often promised to be,—yes, Frank, in this very bower!"

Her words wrung my heart.

"Silent still?" she resumed. "Oh! Frank, hear me. We have loved each other so long and so dearly—and so dearly do we love each other still, that we cannot be separated. The tie between us is too strong and yet so tender. Think of me being sold to that old man—to lie in his arms and not in yours. Do not desert me; say that you will not—another fortnight and it will be too late—too late—all will then be over, and I—far, far away from you!"

Much more did she say as we sat in the bower entwined in a close embrace. It was too dark for me to see the pale, passionate little face; but I felt how wildly her heart was beating against my own. There was a storm of resentment against her father and the rich intruder, conflicting with the hot young love and pitying tenderness that inspired me; but I felt myself powerless, because I was penniless, and anger made me feel revengeful.

The first gleam of day was brightening on the summits of the Lammermuirs when we separated; she stole back to the house, and I darted into the woods. We had promised to meet in the bower next night; but a thousand times better had it been if we had never met more!

I loitered in the neighbourhood of Monkwood, and night

after night we met in that old and secluded bower, where she would lie for hours in my arms, till, out of the dense obscurity of the place, I could see her little white features, her delicate profile and the pearly teeth through the parted lips that smiled no more—even on me—though the eyes and hearts and souls of both of us were still inspired by the most passionate love, a love sharpened by the blind desperation of our circumstances.

Daily in the great world around us we see hopes blighted and affections crushed by poverty; marriages contracted for money or broken off by the lack of it, and some that are about to be made for gold replaced by those that are made for love; but one might well suppose that, in an age so advanced, coercion in such matters had ceased; yet it was not so in our case.

I cannot tell you all that followed—even my voice fails me, as you may hear; but there was no eye on our midnight meetings save One, and that was forgotten.

* * * * * * *

It seemed to me that at our last adieu Milly was more composed; but an illness came upon her—a fever occasioned by grief, agitation, and the chill hours of meeting; I heard that her marriage was delayed, and, in the hope that it might yet be so for a longer period, I sailed as surgeon of the Leith whaler for the North sea.

I was several months absent—a longer period than I could have anticipated; but when far away in the Greenland seas, when the sharp peaks of Spitzbergen were rising against the stars, or in Davis's Straits, where blocks of ice and masses of rock lie mingling on the desert shore, my heart was ever at home by bonnie Monkwood Moat; and in my dreams at night, those meetings in the dark arbour, the sweet, pale profile, the passionate kisses and endearments came back to me with a strange distinctness that gave alike exquisite pleasure and pain.

Our ship was the first of the Scottish fleet of whalers that, after a successful fishing, hauled up for home. The Northern Isles were soon passed; a few days after we sighted the Red Head of Angus; and ere many hours were over I saw the white waves climbing the stern bluff of St. Abb, and the evening sunlight shedding a ruddy glory on the long wavy line of the blue Lammermuirs.

I was up aloft in the fore-cross-trees, for my eyes were full of tears, and I was ashamed lest any of the crew should detect my emotion.

The next night saw me at Monkwood; but, alas! it was already occupied by strangers.

"The proprietor had let it and gone to London; and Miss Montgomerie, that *was*, had sailed with her husband, Judge Wharton, for India."

Such was the brief information a servant gave me, and so ended my romance of love; for, from that time—save once through a newspaper—I have heard no more of Milly Montgomerie.

"She died?" asked Lennard, starting as the Doctor paused abruptly in his story (which he had no doubt begun under a momentary impulse), for his voice became strangely broken by emotion.

"Died—no, God forbid!"

"And this newspaper notice——"

"Was the birth of a son prematurely at Bombay; and then did I feel that, if possible, she was indeed Wharton's wife and more than ever lost to me!"

CHAPTER XI.

BLAIRAVON HOUSE.

On the day of the dinner-party, for the first time after the lapse of several years, did Lennard Blair find himself turning his footsteps up the stately avenue that leads to the house of Blairavon, through an archway on which was carved, in the days when James V was wont to hunt the stag in Falkland woods, the escutcheon of the Blairs, to wit: on a saltier nine mascles of the field, and in chief a mullet of eight points; over all a stag's head *caboshed;* but a luxuriant coat of ivy hid all the sculpture now, so Mr. Vere was pleased to permit it to remain, or perhaps had forgotten its existence. Even the supporters, two of those wild men or demi-savages which are peculiar to the ancient heraldry of Scotland, were completely hidden.

Close up to the low platform of rock on which Blairavon stands are some trees which are the remnant of a forest of the Coille-dhonean, or Men of the Wood—a forest old, perhaps, as the days of the Roman wall. The oaks are aged and hollow now; but against their gnarled stems the boars have ground their tusks and the snow-white bulls their horns in the times of old; and under them, in autumn time, the dark brown leaves lie more than ankle deep.

One of those quaint old places of the years bordering on the Reformation—mansions which are scattered over Scotland and the Isles by thousands—Blairavon was an instance of the first improvement which took place in domestic architecture when the gloomy old castle or lonely peel-tower on the mountain slope, gave place to the gable-ended chateau built in the sheltered glen, but also calculated for security, so far as it could be imparted by strong walls, narrow windows, and iron bars;—hence the striking Scoto-French style of architecture which is peculiar to the country.

Blairavon, with its high, crowstepped gables, and three turrets with steep slated roofs like those of an old chateau by the Loire or Garonne, has a bold and pleasing outline among the venerable timber, the grey rocks and green hills which surround it; and the mind is carried back to the dark days of turmoil, of English invasion, and domestic feud, when its inmates

> "Carved at the meal with gloves of steel,
> And drank the red wine through the helmet barred."

In conformity with some ancient superstition, the masons who built it are said to have mixed in their mortar the blood of those animals which were killed for their food and of the wild beasts of the adjacent forest, that the work might be more lasting. It stood bravely enough in its massive strength; but no more for the Blairs.

Iron gratings and massive window-frames had given place to sheets of plate-glass; and many alterations—improvements Mr. Vere termed them—had been made on the old dwelling-house; but the removal of the dovecot and of the great iron gate on one hand, with the addition of the showy carriages, the sleek horses with plate harness and the liveried servants that passed and repassed the archway on the other, had often served to excite the regret and jealous bitterness of the last proprietor.

It is an old tradition in Scotland that, if a dovecot is pulled down, the wife of the proprietor usually dies within the year; and though the one at Blairavon was a decided eyesore, its demolition was stigmatized by the old fox-hunter as the act of "an atrocious plebeian."

Though modernized internally, so far as possible, to suit the requirements of the present day, it was impossible to forget that the old "manor and fortalice" was a place of those days, when, as the old ballad says,—

> "A man might then behold,
> At Christmas in each hall,

Good fires to curb the cold,
And meat for great and small;
The neighbours kindly bidden,
And all had welcome true;
The poor from gates not chidden
When this old cap was new."

Lennard paused ere he approached the entrance, for the memory of much that his dead father had impressed upon him from childhood—much that he had wisely forgotten while working among practical men at his desk in Liverpool—came welling up now, with something of a choking sensation, as he surveyed the stately old place that had gone from his family for ever.

The rooms in which so many generations of the Blairs had lived with dignity and died with the respect and love of their dependents, where they feasted and roistered, ate and drank, married their daughters with honour, and brought home the daughters of others as wedded brides (whose escutcheons yet were carved on turret and gable), seemed greatly changed now.

The love of the young, the tears of the sorrowing, the pride of some, the wrath of others, had those old walls witnessed for years, as generations succeeded each other, to be gathered at last amid the dust of their predecessors at Inchmachan; and Lennard felt that, though these, with their emotions, had all passed away, there yet lingered in his own heart a mine of bitterness and unavailing regret.

Though silent and lonely enough for eight months of the year since it had passed out of the hands of the old fox-hunting laird (or squire, as those south of the Tweed would style him), Blairavon was instinct with life and gaiety now. Whether it was the result of the grand coal discovery on the estate, Lennard knew not; but he was impressed by an appearance of splendour there, which was not to be found in Vere's villa on the Aigburth-road.

In the drawing-room,—where the shabby, old, oval-backed chairs, chintz-covered sofas, and other furniture of those days of meagre taste, when George III. was king, had given place to marchionesses, couches, and ottomans of damask and velvet; where Brussels' carpets showed their brilliant colours; where, in lieu of the old wax lights, were crystal gasaliers, lit by the produce of the newly-discovered coal-pits; where were stuffed chairs of walnut-wood, of quaint and beautiful design; mirrors that rose from gilded and marble consoles; water colours by Garrick, Gilbert, and Carl Haarg, all glories which would have filled with wonder

the wigged and cuirassed Blairs of other times—in the drawing-room, from which opened now a beautiful conservatory, the shelves whereof were loaded with blooming flowers of singular forms and cabalistic names,—Lennard was received with a smile and blush of pleasure by Hesbia Vere, and with a pretty cordial welcome by her father, and was then presented to the other guests, most of whom were friends then resident with them.

It was with some apparent fuss that Hesbia hastened to introduce Lennard Blair—who was decidedly a distinguished-looking young fellow—to their friends in succession; to Sir Cullender Crowdy, a tall, thin, sallow-visaged, and damp-looking personage; and to Mr. Dabchick, a dapper mannikin of smart, but rather mean appearance. Her cousin, Travice Cheatwood, gave Lennard two fingers only and a greeting the reverse of cordial; and then he was presented to a charming little woman, whom Hesbia named Lady Foster, whose air and singular beauty could not fail to interest him.

"Is not the Doctor with you?" asked Hesbia.

"I have not seen him to-day, Miss Vere."

"You are such friends, Mr. Blair, that I never doubted but you and he would come together."

And now, during the pauses that ensue before guests are all arrived or introduced, and duly marshalled—the somewhat dreary interval that so generally precedes a dinner party—Lennard had time to look about him and see who was there.

"Mr. Cheyne and the Misses Cheyne," were announced by a servant in a preposterously showy livery with aiguilettes.

So many more than Hesbia stated were present now, that Lennard feared he and the Doctor had merely been asked to fill two vacant chairs; but before he could consider this surmise, his hand was warmly shaken by Ranald Cheyne of the Haughs (who, though Lennard knew it not, had many a time kindly paid old Richard Blair's subscription to the West Lothian pack), who then presented him to his "girls," two handsome and blooming blondes, as "the son of his oldest and dearest friend, poor Dick Blair of Blairavon."

Sir Cullender Crowdy, of Crowdymoudy and that ilk, as he oddly designated himself, though a genuine and undoubted Londoner, was, we have said, a tall, pale, black-haired, and unhealthy-looking personage, of some forty-five years, with narrow, stooping shoulders, and long, hairy fingers, with flat tips to them. He inherited no small share of the blood of Judah, though styling himself a baronet of Nova Scotia; his eyes were black as sloes, quick and restless in their

expression, and though his hooked nose had been broken, his face somehow always reminded one of a bird of prey.

He did not wear jewellery; but exhibited, rather ostentatiously, a large signet ring, a Scottish amethyst of beautiful hue, whereon was carved the crest of the Crowdy family, with the motto assumed by it in 1707, *Facie Tenus*, which our friend, the Lyon King, assures us can only be Englished as "up to the mark."

In this strange-looking personage, of whose title we shall say a little at a future time, Lennard Blair erelong found that he was likely to have a more formidable rival than the adventurer Travice Cheatwood.

Rivalry! as he looked on the wealth and ostentatious luxury around him, how dared he, a poor and almost penniless fellow, think of rivalry; yet he felt almost half assured that the heiress, Hesbia Vere, loved him.

Ten years the senior of Lennard, a "plucked" medical student, a sharp hand at billiards and sharper still at cards, Travice Cheatwood had a very small income, which he eked out in many ways; but his betting-book was his great resource, and the hope of picking up a wife with money was ever before him.

His cousin Hesbia he considered fair game, indeed almost his own peculiar property, and he viewed with emotions little short of savage any interference in that quarter.

Previous to his arrival, Hesbia, whose heart abhorred a vacuum, had been dividing her smiles between Sir Cullender and Mr. Dabchick—flirting desperately with each when the other was not present; though she certainly experienced some difficulty in coquetting with the baronet—a solemn, strange, and reserved man, whose real character she had early found the impossibility of fathoming. But now the little Edinburgh advocate, Mr. Dalrymple Pennyworth Dabchick—"D. P. Dab," as he was usually called by the small wits of the law courts—had been completely thrown over, and his pique thereat was sobered down into settled disgust; for little Dab thought himself a personage alike of consummate talent and the most colossal public value.

The dislike between Hesbia and the county ladies was quite mutual, so she received the Misses Cheyne with a stately coldness that she should not have displayed in her own house.

Nearly tall in stature, with a rounded queenly figure, Lennard thought Hesbia was looking beautiful. The lily was not whiter or purer than her skin, and her hands and feet were perfect in contour. Her carriage at times was

haughty and defiant; and, when excited, she would make her soft-brown eyes flash, and the masses of her crisp chestnut hair more as if they were instinct with life.

Lennard was sighing in the conviction that he, of course, could not be the favoured person who was to lead her as hostess to the dining-room. He was somewhat relieved, however, when he saw her take the arm of old Doctor Magnus Kirkford, the parish minister; and still more so when she whispered to him behind her fan, just as the gong was beginning to roar in the vestibule,—

"No word yet of your tiresome medical friend; a ploughboy ill with the measles, or some such thing, no doubt. Take in one of the Cheyne girls, and sit on my left side, I have so much to say to you."

It was such a whisper and such a glance as Hesbia alone could give, and so poor Lennard's heart began to beat happily, and he was about to address a few words of commonplace to Lady Foster—a pale, little woman, with a clear intellectual type of beauty, a singular sadness and sweetness in her mouth, and deep violet eyes, which had long black lashes, but whose *petite* figure was towered over and outshone by the dashing Hesbia; but ere she could reply to his regret for the absence of her husband, Sir Philip Foster, who had been telegraphed for eastward to Edinburgh, the door was flung open by the tall valet of the calves and aiguilettes, who announced in a pompous style,—

"Doctor Francis Feverley!"

Then as the Doctor came forward with a pleasant smile and flushed face, nervous manner, and one of his kid gloves torn, to apologise for being a little late, a faint sound like a gasp escaped Lady Foster, who let both her fan and bouquet fall.

Lennard adroitly picked them up and restored them just as the company began to move off to the dining-room; then he saw that the camellias of which the bouquet was composed were not more white and waxen in colour than the face of Lady Foster.

Why was this? Whence the strange emotion?

CHAPTER XII

THE DINNER-PARTY.

SUCH entertainments as this one at Blairavon are pretty much alike everywhere, yet among the guests were a few characters or ingredients such as are not to be met with every day.

All the accessories that wealth and luxury can afford were there; rich viands, various wines, glittering plate and shining crystal, with pomp and servants in shiny liveries, and, oddly enough, not *all* alike; and, from the caviare and curaçoa at the beginning, to the coffee and maraschino at its close, through all its elaborate details of "potages, poissons, relevés, entrées," and so forth, as the gilded and embossed bills of fare had them (to the extreme bother of the parish minister and one or two others), Hesbia's small dinner party was carried out to perfection; and papa Vere, with his red and white clarets, did his part well.

Lennard could detect an elaborate attempt at high *ton* which certainly fell short of the mark, and may have excited the secret ridicule of the servants, who had seen the true metal elsewhere.

He experienced a disappointment, however, at the beginning, in not getting the seat next Hesbia; for Miss Cheyne, with whom he had been paired off, lingered to address something to Doctor Feverley, who did not immediately attend or seem to comprehend; and this delay, brief though it was, by the subsequent contingency partially spoiled Lennard's dinner, for the chair on Hesbia's left hand was immediately filled by the dapper Mr. Dabchick.

Travice Cheatwood on that very morning had made a blunt and formal proposal to Hesbia, and had been rejected by her, laughingly however. Cousin Travice was in no way broken-hearted; but though inspired by jealous anger of Lennard and of Crowdy conjunctly and severally, feeling bitterly revengeful, and by many secret circumstances almost desperate, with considerable skill and coolness seemed disposed to revenge himself on Hesbia by engaging in a flirtation with Lady Foster.

This he soon discovered to be an impossibility, as the pale little beauty seemed seriously indisposed, silent, nervous, and incapable of attending to him on the one hand, or to her host on the other; for Mr. Vere could talk only of shares, scrip, and the state of the money market.

Lennard was not without hope that when the ladies retired to the drawing-room, he might have an opportunity (if Hesbia entered the conservatory, or was seated at the piano) of addressing her, and requesting at least an interview—a meeting, somewhere—as a proposal such as he had first fancied seemed then an impossibility; and even with this thought in his head, and the words in which he would give it utterance hovering on his tongue, and while exchanging tender and meaning glances with Hesbia—glances by

which they could already understand each other without words—he felt his courage fail.

Amid the wealth that surrounded her, and the stately aspect of the old house, once the home of his father, and now of *hers*, Lennard felt himself a fortune-hunter like Travice Cheatwood, and his proud spirit spurned the false position in which his fate had placed him.

Vere, he knew, had great wealth. He had ships that came and went from the vast docks of Liverpool; argosies whose keels ploughed every sea under the sun. He had a magnificent mansion in the direction of Aigburth, gorgeously furnished, with pictures and bronzes, marble busts and vases, with a retinue of servants; and now he had Blairavon, with more splendours in the way of paintings and upholstery than the old lairds thereof could have conjured up without the aid of witchcraft; and more grooms, gamekeepers, and gardeners, more men and women servants in and about the place, than were requisite when Randal Blair entertained the Lords of the Congregation, or the Regent Murray, when on his last fatal march to Linlithgow.

Amid the intervals during which the troublesome silver *entrée* dishes, with cockscombs and mushrooms, boudoin of lobster, and so forth, went round, Lennard strove to interest himself with the pretty, fair girl by his side, who, sooth to say, seemed very much interested in him, for there was a sadness in his eyes, and an abstraction in his manner, the real source of which she little suspected; and thus, while replying to all the graceful nothings she was saying, he was glancing from time to time at Hesbia, and listening with weariness to the topics discussed by those about him.

The sallow, lanky, and black-haired baronet, though at times affecting to talk "Peerage," slid more easily and familiarly into a discussion on the money-market with his host, and seemed to be much more at home in the disbursements of the dividends on consols, floating capital, bills, and short loans, and so forth, than in the works of Sir Robert Douglas, or Sir Bernard Burke.

The subject of the probable winner of the Derby was, of course, introduced by Travice Cheatwood, amid an affectation of talking of the county pack and races; but no one there seemed disposed to follow up the topic, not even old Ranald Cheyne of the Haughs, who knew too much of the speaker to make even the smallest remark that might be distorted into a bet. Moreover, he was just then busy discussing with the minister—who, like most Scotch divines, farmed his own glebe—the mysteries of top dressing, subsoil

drainage, and planting belts of firs, or turf dykes, and hedges. Lennard being a crack shot of the Liverpool Rifle Corps, Volunteering was next spoken of; but with great contempt by Mr. Dabchick, as he had not been made a captain, at least.

At last the ladies rose to retire; and Lennard, though his eyes followed the stately figure of Hesbia, as she sailed out of the dining-room, with her long dress floating behind her, could not fail to detect a singular mutual glance, one expressive of pain and sorrow, exchanged by Lady Foster and Doctor Feverley, as she passed him in her way towards the door. Strange to say, the Doctor's face was nearly as pale as her own, and he trembled as her skirt brushed past him.

"Here lies some hidden secret!" thought Lennard.

And now the gentlemen began to close in towards the host, and as the butler replenished the wine decanters, Travice Cheatwood, who was already a little elevated, and could not resist the temptation of saying saucy things, began with the doctor and lawyer, simply because they were inoffensive fellows; and certainly he had the peculiar art of dealing in unpleasantry, which could neither be accepted as a jest, nor yet resented as an insult.

"Did you drive over from your shop, Doctor?" he asked.

"I don't keep a shop—if you mean a laboratory, Mr. Cheatwood."

"Well, your diggings, bunk, whatever you call it?"

"I rode. I can't afford to keep a vehicle yet."

"Though a rhubarb-coloured pill-box is useful in its way, you are, perhaps, better without it."

"Why?"

"Few Scotsmen drive well, or are good whips, except," he added deliberately, having heard of Feverley's connection with Jamaica, "except in the West Indies, where they were first-rate drivers of niggers. But the pill-box *is* useful; it may follow as an *empty* compliment at a funeral, when you are doctoring elsewhere," he added, laughing broadly at his own jest.

"Sir, a doctor may very seriously regret the death of a patient," said Feverley, reddening with positive annoyance, yet unwilling to take offence.

"Regret, of course; he is concerned perhaps as much *in* the demise as *at* it."

"How, sir?"

"It is a loss anyway."

"Pass the decanter," said little Dabchick, who had vainly and nervously made more than one attempt to interrupt Cheatwood, "which wine are you taking, Doctor?"

"White claret."

"I was once retained in a singular case about white claret."

"Please Dabchiek, don't begin to talk law, Scotch law, of all things," interrupted the constitutionally impertinent Cheatwood. "I think that all who go to law are idiots."

"Indeed! and why so?" asked Dabchick, looking a little ruffled.

"I am only quoting one of the fraternity in saying so," replied Cheatwood, who having a design to lure Dabchick into a game of billiards (for the lawyer was wearying of ecarté, which they had played every night, and always to his loss), besides, he had no fear of him, so far as Hesbia was concerned, Mr. Dalrymple P. Dabchick being a weak-looking little creature, with sandy hair, sore eyes, and a retroussé nose, with a chin, however, which indicated the most inordinate amount of self-esteem, usually the strongest element which now pervades the provincials of the Bar. "I once heard of an *avocat* of Strasbourg, who, on being taken dangerously ill, sent for a brother of the bag, to make his will, in which he bequeathed to the hospital for the insane, the sum of seventy thousand florins. On his brother-lawyer expressing astonishment at his bequest to idiots,—

"'Mon frère,' replied the repentant *avocat*, 'they are the very persons on whom my ill-gotten gains should be bestowed. From idiots those florins were won, and to idiots they shall return.'"

While this odd style of conversation went on, Lennard was recalling the repulsion he felt for Cheatwood on that night when, total strangers to each other, they travelled by the express train from Liverpool, and when again he saw him at the churchyard-gate of Inchmachan.

It was, we have said, a peculiarity of Cheatwood's face, that while his mouth was distended by a broad sardonic grin at some of his own supposed witticisms, and showing all his glistening teeth, his eyes remained stolid, unmoved in expression, or having, if anything, a species of cold glare in them.

"Blair, come here beside me," said Mr. Vere, with one of his pleasantest smiles, pointing to the chair which Lady Foster had recently quitted; "I must have a talk with you now that we have an opportunity."

Thus invited, Lennard with alacrity changed his place.

The truth was, that Mr. Vere had a great desire to acquire the little patch of land named Oakwoodlee, "for has not the vineyard of Naboth been always an eyesore to neighbouring potentates?" He disliked the interest that attached to the

old family lingering in the neighbourhood, and had his own secret views regarding Lennard Blair; but he knew that the latter set an imaginary, almost superstitious, value upon the retention of the old Jointure House; he had also heard something of the tradition of the Charter Stone, which he wished to see macadamised into metal for the roads, and which he considered as "a piece of old bosh, behind the age, and all that sort of thing;" and he only waited for an opportunity of sounding Lennard as to the sale of the ground, but felt a delicacy in approaching the subject just then.

Times had been when Mr. Vere was not indisposed to view with favour the intimacy of his daughter and the son of old Blairavon; but now there were secrets in the firm known only to himself which perhaps compelled him to have other views regarding *her*.

"You have looked very dull all the evening, Blair; take another glass of wine, and get up the steam," said Mr. Vere, who, however, could bear with great philosophy the mental or bodily pains of *others*, and whose mouth was compressed, as is usual in those who are much in the habit of restraining such emotions as they have.

"My father was born in this house, my uncle Lennard, too; and in this house I, too, saw the light, and here my mother died," said Blair, as if to account for his abstraction. "I can remember as if it were but yesterday, the nodding of the hearse-plumes as the wind stirred the leaves in the avenue when the funeral train went forth, and I sat at that window watching it, and wondering in my little heart what was my loss, why all about me were so sad, and why I was not at her knee. So the old house is, to me, full of the saddest interest, Mr. Vere."

"Of course—of course," replied the other, jingling some silver in his pockets, and thinking there was no use of speaking about Oakwoodlee when Lennard was in this sentimental mood of mind; so, following out his own train of thought, he blundered on in this fashion: "Your father, worthy man, never could get on well with me, a matter which I now deplore, as it is irreparable."

"Irreparable, indeed!" sighed Lennard.

"As I could not trace back my descent—a thing which no one values nowadays—like those knights and lairds, or what-d'ye-call-'ems of Blairavon, whose queer coats-of-arms are stuck up over all the house, and who very likely could neither sign their names nor earn an honest penny—he thought little of me, indeed; and never forgave me for

being a prosperous and industrious trader, who acquired that which he was throwing to the dogs; but pardon me, Blair, and fill your glass; what I say gives you pain, I see."

Lennard did wince with secret annoyance at those remarks which he knew to be perfectly just and true. Then Mr. Vere, who shared some of the angry prejudices of his daughter, added, with what he meant to be a smile,—

"In this rural district, however, Mr. Richard Blair, even in his reduced circumstances, was always treated with more respect by the cottars than I. Though I had legally bought Blairavon at its marketable price—bought it with money earned by years of hard and patient industry—the people here view me as a species of intruder; and though I spend thousands in the place, it would be considered good news at the smithy and spirit-shop if I broke my neck in one of the new coalpits, or was found in the pond at Craigellon, like your uncle Lennard."

Lennard intensely disliked the bad taste of all these remarks. He could barely forgive them even in the father of Hesbia, and endeavoured to lead the conversation to the business of the firm, and to some recent correspondence that he had been conducting in Spanish—a language in which he was a proficient—with Don Juan Leonardo & Co., of Vera Cruz; then at once, while the baronet half turned his chair and became all attention, Mr. Vere plunged deeply into the matter of imports and exports—flour from America; cotton, sugar, indigo, and spices from the East Indies; rum, coffee, and tobacco from the West; and their transactions with the merchants of Brazil, Chili, and Vera Cruz; in the midst of which he said,—

"We mean to send you out to Vera Cruz some of these days, for the double purpose of cementing our connection with Don Juan, and establishing a branch of the house there. It will be a most lucrative agency."

Lennard bowed an assent, but his heart, though set on future fortune, sank at the thought of leaving Hesbia behind him, and at that moment there was a move made by all towards the drawing-room.

While one or two lingered to comment on the merits of the portrait of a cherry-cheeked girl by Greuze, and a savage mountain-pass in Calabria, by Salvator Rosa, Feverley pressed the hand of Lennard, and said,—

"Would to heaven I had never been invited here!"

"What on earth is the matter with you, Doctor, you look positively ill?"

"And ill I am—ill at heart; but hush! you remember quizzing me about meeting Lady Foster?"

"Perfectly; the other night at Oakwoodlee."

"The night I was seized with a—perhaps foolish fit of confidence."

"Foolish?"

"Pardon me, but my head wanders."

"Well?"

"Oh, Blair! 'upon what slight threads do the events of life turn!' How little could I then imagine that *she*—this Lady Foster—was the Milly Montgomerie of Monkwood? or could you suppose the dark and tender secret that was between us?"

"Do you not confide in me?" asked Lennard, reproachfully, after a pause.

"I believe you to be true as steel."

"But her husband's name was, I thought you told me, Wharton?"

"Changed to Foster for a Cumberland estate, so Doctor Kirkford told me; and he was knighted by the Governor-General at Calcutta as Sir Philip Wharton Foster. I cannot face her again; you know not what we have both endured during the last three hours! I must leave——"

"Not without bidding adieu to Miss Vere; she would never forgive——"

"True, true—poor wretch that I am!"

And they passed on with the other guests.

CHAPTER XIII.

HESBIA'S DRAWING-ROOM.

On entering the drawing-room, which was lofty, spacious, and magnificently furnished, and lit up, Dr. Feverley looked round with a hasty and haggard glance, and experienced a species of relief on perceiving that Lady Foster was *not* there.

Mr. Vere immediately missed and inquired for her.

"She became indisposed while at dinner, papa," said Hesbia; "did you not perceive how pale she looked?"

"Paleness is her normal colour, I think," said Sir Cullender; "as it is my own, I don't consider it altogether a sign of ill-health, Miss Vere."

"But she is far from well," persisted Hesbia, "and has retired to her own room, where I think the Doctor should see her."

"Not unless she should wish it," said Feverley, with ner-

vous haste; "until she sends for me, I must be excused, my dear Miss Vere, from intruding."

"This is her little boy," continued Hesbia, leading forward a pretty child of some four or five years old, who had been nestling on a hassock by the knee of Mrs. Kirkford, the minister's wife, a kind and motherly old lady, who, together with the Misses Cheyne, had been toying and playing with him, after the manner of ladies with children in general.

"Isn't he a little love, Doctor?" asked one.

A clever observer might have seen how nervously Feverley's lips were quivering, how pale he was, and with how strange a glance he seemed to eye the unconscious child, who looked up to him with eyes of crystal clearness, not dark violet in tint like his mother's, but bright blue like Feverley's own; he had crispy, curly hair, and cheeks that were round and red as winter apples.

"What is your name, darling?" asked the Doctor, as he lifted the child on his knee.

"Franky—little Franky."

"Frank is my name too," said the Doctor, in a somewhat broken voice.

"I am called so from my grandpapa," added the child; "and I am papa's very good boy."

"True, it was his name—I remember," said Feverley, as if speaking to himself.

The boy eyed with wonder, and something of distrust too, this stranger who evinced so much interest in him;—and how was it with the poor Doctor?

As he looked on the little boy's face, and traced there the minute features and the likeness of the mother, all the man's yearning heart seemed to gush forth, and, with something like a sob in his throat, he kissed the boy so tenderly that the latter opened his great blue eyes wider with increasing wonder.

Feverley kept the child on his knee caressingly till his time for bed arrived, and to his nurse—who was sent by mamma—he gave him with a reluctance which caused Hesbia and the young ladies to rally him for his fatherly way; but Travice Cheatwood whispered to them that it was "all acting and professional bosh, by which he hoped to catch mothers of families and lady patients."

Hesbia, who had been in conversation with the clergyman and Mr. Cheyne, now turned from them, and proceeded to open the piano, a task which Lennard hastened to share.

"I am about to play," she whispered.

"What?"

"Oh, anything you please," said she, drawing her gloves hastily off her very white and pretty hands. On her left wrist was a present of which Lennard had begged her acceptance, a bracelet of those beautiful pink-hued Scottish pearls which are now in such high reputation, and which had belonged to his great-grandmother. "You know," she added, "that I can thump out Rossini, Thalberg, and Mendelssohn too; but keep beside me—I am sick of those dreary country respectabilities, with 'their weary propriety and unendurable twaddle; talk to me while I play, turn the leaves, and make yourself generally useful."

Then running her fingers swiftly over the keys, Hesbia awoke with spirit the tone of the grand piano—one of Collard's best repetition-trichords—as she proceeded to play and converse the while.

"How did you like Miss Cheyne?"

"Very much."

"Not too much, I hope!"

"She is a very pleasant, quiet. and lady-like girl."

"But of a county family—most fearfully county family—bah!" added Hesbia, making a crash with her outspread fingers, while her brown eyes sparkled. "I hate all such stuck-up people."

"The poor girl gives herself no airs; she does not require to do so."

"Is that a hit at me?"

"Oh, Miss Vere!" urged Lennard, colouring with vexation, but saying no more, as he knew this to be perilous ground with Hesbia; so he continued to listen in silence and turn the leaves, for two of his rivals, Cheatwood and Dabchick, were close by.

"Miss Cheyne has, I know, very pretty hands," resumed Hesbia, "and a foot of which she can make a wonderful use at croquet, when she displays her instep. Well, I shall be thankful when this drawing-room is done up in brown holland and lavender, and again abandoned to the spiders for a time."

"Are you already weary of Blairavon?" asked Lennard, with a marked inflection of the voice.

"Weary—I should think so!"

"To me, who have been so long in Liverpool that I was almost forgetting what a mountain was like, this seems strange."

"The country is all very well, but a little bit of it goes a long way with me—Scotland especially. Pardon me, dear Mr. Blair, but I can't help saying so."

The truth was that the county ladies, as Hesbia knew, and was wont to say, "understood the whole situation," and valued neither her nor her papa for their reputed wealth. She simply hated them; and knew that at races, meets, and balls they "tolerated her," observed her fast ways, her diamonds, and her dresses with critical eyes and elevated brows, and with manners cold or shy—polite, but never cordial. Even the overdone richness of her toilette—always that of "a girl of the period,"—the perfumes with which every lace and skirt, flounce and flower, were redolent, were commented upon, with her seat on horseback and bearing in the carriage, where she always sat upright and fell forward.

The county people she considered simply intolerable.

Yet many there were who admitted that, though Miss Vere "was vain to her finger-ends," she might wear the most brilliant colours and dresses beyond her years, the most wonderful diamonds and jewellery, and yet, singular to say, neither look over-dressed nor over-decorated, as some girls might have done. This arose from the amplitude of her figure, the purity of her complexion, the brilliance of her expression, and the general coquettish style of her undeniable beauty.

She sang many things in good style and with great good nature. What they were, Heaven knows; certainly, Lennard did not, for he was so full of her and his own thoughts, and especially content with one feature in the performance—that while lingeringly and lovingly turning the leaves, his hand and hers were always somehow coming in contact.

He was awkward about it, perhaps.

To whisper anything of a private or tender nature into Hesbia's pretty white ear was impossible then, for Cheatwood was watching them closely; and Dabchick, though jealous and disgusted too, was still disposed to hover about the heiress, who could only understand the half of what he said, as he spoke in that wonderful Anglo-Scotch patois peculiar to his fraternity and the law-courts of the modern Athens.

Bored by his presence, Hesbia resigned the music-stool to Miss Cheyne, and led the minister's wife into her little boudoir, which was a miracle of elegance and luxury—for she was not without taste as well as vanity.

The conversation was pretty general in the room; good digestion seemed to wait on appetite, and while the servants went round with coffee and ices, Mr. Vere was jocose and little Dabchick unusually jolly; even the tall, sallow baronet

relaxed his unpleasant visage and taciturn manner; but Travice Cheatwood was vicious. Wine always had a bad effect upon him.

He had been watching the scene at the piano, and thought he discovered a silent but secret understanding between Hesbia and Lennard Blair, on whom he now resolved to fasten, and whom he arrested at the door of the boudoir, whither our hero was about to follow Hesbia.

In his deep and angry suspicions of Lennard, the cousin was anxious to discover the real state of matters between him and Hesbia; but though a cunning he was a blundering fellow, and knew not how to go about it. Somehow, impertinence came more natural to him than suavity, and after luring Lennard to a long and stately corridor (which lay between the drawing and dining-rooms) on pretence of looking at a picture,—

"It is an absurd, even ugly, looking place, this house of Blairavon," said he; "I wonder how the governor ever came to buy it."

"Absurd?" queried Lennard, reddening; "ugly, do you say?"

"Pardon me—by Jove! I forgot that the old place once belonged to your family," he replied, sneeringly.

"It was my father's and his forefathers', for centuries, and is very ancient."

"Well, a place may be old and yet be unsightly and absurd, just as a man may be old and disreputable, or a spendthrift."

"I don't see the parallel," said Lennard, abruptly turning on his heel, and re-entering the drawing-room.

"Dry, proud snob!" muttered Cheatwood, savagely, and with a dangerous gleam in his eye; "but I'll take the wind out of your sails yet, my fine fellow—our junior partner, as you think yourself. By Jove, if you only knew as much of old Vere as I do, you might be less easy in your mind."

Cheatwood, however, had no desire to quarrel outwardly with Blair; he knew that the young man had some loose cash, to share which over cards would be very convenient; then there was the secret in regard to Hesbia, which he wished to learn, so he became more suave in his manner, and artfully contrived to get himself included in an invitation to a dinner which Lennard was giving to the Doctor and Dabchick, "just to come over in a friendly way and take their lamb and green peas with him at Oakwoodlee about six to-morrow."

"Thanks; I am your man," said Travice; "do we play ecarté?"

"A little," said Lennard.

"Then we shall have a game to-morrow night, or cut in for a quiet rubber, eh?"

"With pleasure," said Lennard: but Dabchick, who had played a good deal with Mr. Cheatwood of late, made a faint response; and that gentleman, feeling assured that the morrow would be a lucrative day, went gaily through the drawing-room into the conservatory where Hesbia was good-naturedly culling a nosegay for old Mrs. Magnus Kirkford, before the good lady set out for the Manse.

Lennard, who was still speaking to Feverley, did not observe where Cheatwood had gone; he only knew that Hesbia was busy among the shelves of brilliant exotics, and went there also for the purpose of attempting to interest her by the double announcement that he was soon to start for Liverpool, and afterwards, for a long and indefinite time, to Vera Cruz; and he was fully intending to make some allusion to a more defined and tender form of friendship; but this intention, like his feelings, received a shock—a check, on hearing nothing less than a proposal made to her by another, and his unintentional eavesdropping came about in the following manner:—

CHAPTER XIV.

A PROPOSAL.

THE conservatory was spacious, with a great pyramidal stand, or shelved partition in the centre; and while passing round this barrier, which intervened between him and Hesbia, Lennard, to his extreme annoyance, was joined by his father's old friend, Mr. Cheyne, who was a great florist, and was always pottering about bulbs, cucumber beds, melon frames, and so forth. Unfortunately, being rather deaf, he was quite unaware of the presence of others in the conservatory, so he at once engaged Lennard in a discourse upon hot-air apparatus and exotics with mysterious names and properties; but this did not prevent the unlucky lover, whose ears were quickened by apprehension, from hearing Hesbia and Travice Cheatwood in close conversation on the other side of the great flower-stand.

"You remember our little confab, Hesbia?" asked Cheatwood.

"When? we have so many confabs, as you call them."

"And disputes too; but I mean this morning."

"Well; but don't recur to it, please."

"And why not?"

"It is useless to refer to your magnificent proposal."

"Sneering again, and thereby adding pain——"

"Pain!" echoed Hesbia, laughing; "now don't be a fool, Travice; once and for all, I cannot and will not have you."

"Will not, and cannot! Are you in earnest, or is this some of your flirting nonsense?"

"I am in stern earnest," she said, laughing again, and burying her pink nostrils into the bouquet she was arranging with great taste and skill.

"Laughed at, am I?" continued Travice, grinding his teeth. "Well, I came down to this outlandish hole, and have loafed about it on a precious fool's errand."

"Not entirely so, if papa gave you some days ago the cheque for £400, which you spoke of this morning, to show me how high you stood in his favour."

Travice Cheatwood changed colour painfully, for the document referred to had undergone some remarkable changes in his hands.

"I am sure, also," added Hesbia, "that you win money from all our friends."

"I have won £60 from the baronet and Dabchick at billiards, and done that soft snob of a Doctor into the odds on 'Traviata' at the Epsom, though the poor fool knows nothing about it—don't think he even knows where Epsom is, though I suppose he has heard of the salts so named. But it is hard to be treated thus by you, Hesbia, after enduring your baronet, Dabchick, old Kirkford, and that set to the last stage of boredom."

"Sweet cousin, you are very polite!" said she, curtseying.

"I'll not take to Tennyson and a cigar for breakfast, or to Byron and moonlight for supper, at all events," he replied while eyeing her malevolently.

"You would require to turn over a new leaf to suit me, Travice, dear," said Hesbia, willing to coquette a little with him still.

"I always mean to do so."

"To-morrow, no doubt?"

"Yes, but I can never overtake to-morrow."

"Why?" continued Hesbia, banteringly.

"Because it is always twelve hours ahead. Your governor——"

"Say 'papa.' I am shocked by your slang, Travice."

"Well, your papa makes money by the bushel, the old name and spirit of Cheatwood are still in the firm; and why should not I benefit thereby?"

"Your father's interest was bought; and you have always been a bad boy."

Cheatwood uttered an oath.

"Come, now, Travice, let me pass to the drawing-room, and don't be absurd, or make a fool of yourself by growing angry."

"If any other person is the means of making a fool of me, by —— (and with flashing eyes and a pallid visage, he swore again, looking as ruffianly as his speech imported) I'll make cold meat of him, and send him to old Fireworks before his time!"

Hesbia shrugged her smooth shoulders, and said, disdainfully,—

"Don't indulge in tall talk."

"Who is using slang now?"

"Melodramatic threats are intensely absurd, and there are rural police even in Scotland. You must have seen them, cousin—big six-foot fellows, in sham military uniforms, with thistles and St. Andrew's crosses on their felt helmets. They are vulgarly muscular and unpleasant-looking men."

Thus bantered, Cheatwood withdrew scowling, and in his confusion, or irritation, stumbled without apology against the pale and shark-eyed baronet, who was lingering at the conservatory door.

Had he been aware of what was going on? Anyway, he was looking as dark as if "things were wrong in Mincing or Mark-lane—or the devil was upon 'Change."

The night was too far advanced now to afford Lennard time for the opportunity so earnestly sought.

Mr. Cheyne and his daughters drove off, taking the clergyman and his wife in their carriage, as the manse of Blairavon stood on the way to the Haughs. Doctor Feverley now appeared hat in hand, and Lennard, who had no excuse for lingering, prepared to depart.

Hesbia bade him adieu cordially and with much *empressement*, slyly returning the pressure of his fingers with her right hand, while the left, which was placed behind her, we are sorry to add, she permitted Cheatwood to kiss, when he pretended to stoop for a fallen flower.

Crowdy's quick, small eyes saw the whole affair, though Lennard did not; and with the memory of that coquettish pressure of his hand, and of the soft, tender smile of two

beautiful brown eyes, he walked homeward almost a happy man, with his friend the Doctor.

The latter was mounted, and rode slowly by his side, buried in thought.

The night was beautiful, the air calm and soft, not a leaf was stirring in the woods of Blairavon, the green hills stood clearly defined in the moonlight on one hand, on the other Lennard could see the blue sky reddened by the glare from the engines by which those mines of wealth, the coal-pits, were worked night and day by double gangs of men—wealth, the loss of which had broken his father's heart.

The Vere "set" was not a very distinguished one; such was Lennard Blair's decided conviction, and he deplored it. Lady Foster was certainly irreproachable in bearing, manner and appearance; but the baronet with the odd name, Sir Cullender Crowdy, seemed to be a man there was no fathoming, and he resolved to question Dabchick closely about him on the morrow, for Dabchick knew something of everybody or of everybody's affairs.

"It was a great relief to me, Blair, when I found that Lady Foster was *not* in the drawing-room on our return to it," said the Doctor, letting his reins drop on the horse's mane. "I could not again trust myself in her presence. There is more than the mere sentiment of a boyish first love in this, for I am no longer a boy nor she a girl. I believe in this strong and tender love, though not that it either breaks the heart or completely blights a life——"

"Except in novels," said Lennard.

"Novels of course—yet it has cast a shadow on my days."

After a pause,

"I would to God, Blair, I had not met her again—had not looked upon her face!" exclaimed Feverley in a broken voice; "and then there is her old and palsied husband too—tottering on the verge of eternity."

"It was lucky we escaped him, I think," said Lennard, scarcely knowing what to say.

"My love for Milly has flamed up anew; but it is as the flame of the lamp which the ancients left with their dead—a light I dare not show, dare not acknowledge even to myself—a flame hidden in a tomb!"

And much more did the poor Doctor say and rhapsodise to describe his emotions, till Lennard, to change the subject, said,

"And now that you have seen him, Feverley, what do you think of my rival?"

"Which?"

"The deuce—have I *two?*"

"Well, the lanky baronet with the broken nose and Jewish looking eyes watched you and Miss Vere the whole evening like a lynx. Of course she is a prize that many will contend for; but you refer to Mr. Cheatwood."

"Yes," said Lennard curtly, with an air of annoyance.

"I think he is 'a dog in forehead, and at heart a deer'—or worse, a wolf rather. If Gall and Spurzheim knew anything of their trade, I may say that fellow's head and face should hang him!" said Doctor Feverley.

"Rivalry apart, though the features are good, I cannot help agreeing with you, Doctor, and think that Lavater would do so too."

"But he dines with us at Oakwoodlee to-morrow, does he not?"

"I had no desire to invite him; but he was standing near when I asked you, and politeness——"

"Of course; but I must beware of him; he has entangled me—how I cannot tell—in a bet on an English race, a matter of which I am as ignorant as of what Professor Smyth saw in the Great Pyramid. That Cheatwood has views with regard to his cousin there cannot be a doubt, and that he seems a reckless—even dangerous character too. But that baronet——"

"Oh, Feverley, the man is perfectly hideous!"

"He has a title; Mr. Vere knows its value; the baronet is a man, I hear, well known on 'Change, though what his line of business I never could precisely learn; and I know enough of Mr. Vere to see that Mammon is the god of his idolatry."

They proceeded in silence for a time, and the lights of Blairavon were hidden among the copse-wood now. Following up the last train of thought, Feverley said,—

"By the late melancholy event at home, your income will of course be increased, Blair."

"My father left many debts; but these and all expenses paid by letting the shootings and a few acres of grass and so forth, I shall have £200 yearly—and then there is a salary or share in the business at Liverpool."

"All this would be wealth to me; such are things by comparison."

"Still all are little enough to offer for Miss Vere's acceptance."

"Yet how pleasant it is to put one's foot upon a piece of land—even an acre or two—and feel that it is one's *own*."

"True," said Lennard thoughtfully as he looked over the

fertile miles of meadow and green-growing corn that should have been his, stretching away in the moonlight to the very base of the hills; but now they had reached the little wicket of the pathway that led to Oakwoodlee, the roughcast façade of which shone white amid its dark grove of Scottish pines. There the friends parted, and the Doctor galloped off towards his little cottage in the hamlet.

CHAPTER XV.

BUSINESS.

WHILE this conversation was going on between Lennard and Feverley in the moonlight, a mile or so from Blairavon, another was being maintained on the subject of Hesbia by Mr. Vere and Sir Cullender, as they lingered over their cigars and a glass of Madeira, in the smoking-room, where the gas-lights were subdued in the gilt brackets that projected from the wall, and where, through the open windows, the moonlight and the soft atmosphere of the summer night stole pleasantly in together.

The decorations of this room were very simple. The walls were of olive-green tint, and the carpet of cocoa-nut matting; divans and easy chairs of various kinds were there, with spittoons of elegant patterns and boxes of cigars, while on the walls were a few racing and hunting pictures, which whilom had belonged to old Mr. Richard Blair.

Mr. Cheatwood and Mr. Dabchick were in the billiard-room at the other end of the corridor. Indeed all the leisure moments of the former gentleman were spent in that apartment, practising cannons and wonderful strokes, or in the study of his betting book and his chances on the Newmarket Craven meeting, the Catterick Bridge races, and so forth; in noting horses struck out of their engagements, arrivals, entries for selling, and other sporting news; and this branch of study on "coming events" he usually pursued with knitted brows and bitten nails, or strange exclamations, as hope or perplexity influenced him.

Left to themselves for a half-hour or so, Mr. Vere and the baronet were seated each under a gas bracket, by means of which position each thought he could watch the play of the other's features while he kept his own concealed; for the conversation ran chiefly on Hesbia and the baronet's presents and attentions to that young lady—attentions which he frankly admitted he had been paying, and she had been receiving with apparent good grace.

Vere was angling to secure the baronet for a son-in-law; while the latter was extremely curious to know how money matters stood, or might stand in the future.

"You are young-looking, Sir Cullender—without a grey hair," remarked Mr. Vere during a pause.

"Still I am past five-and-forty—you flatter me."

"A period not too old for love-making, I hope."

"For romantic love-making certainly," said the baronet, his quick, small eyes twinkling hideously; "but that is a commodity in which we business men—we men of the world, Mr. Vere, are not wont to traffic."

"No time for it—eh, Sir Cullender? Your title is recommendation enough to any young girl," said Vere.

The baronet gave an uneasy smile.

"In what part of Scotland did the estates of your family lie?"

"In the north."

"And they were lost, you say?"

"In some of the civil wars. Since then we have resided in England—taken root in London, in fact."

"And to better purpose, no doubt. At five-and-forty, it is not too old, I hope, to admire beauty and enjoy all the pleasures of life, which are in the flush in some measure."

"Your daughter, Miss Vere, is, I admit, charming," said the baronet; "and she has dazzled me greatly; but she seems to dazzle all, especially that young fellow Blair."

"How?" asked Mr. Vere, angrily.

"His gaze was never off her to-night."

"Blair—pshaw! They are good friends, that is all. He is in my counting-room, and—and believes himself to have a share in the firm."

An expression of intelligence and intense cunning played for a moment over the sallow features of Sir Cullender, as he echoed the word "Believes?"

"Yes—yes," replied Mr. Vere, with a careless air, while rattling his pocketsful of loose silver; "a thousand or two sunk with us—that is all. The reason that I tolerate him here is, that I want to get his patch of land called Oakwoodlee into my own hands—it is a nuisance having it thrust like a wedge into the heart of my estate—and then I shall find an excuse for despatching him to South America—say Vera Cruz."

Mr. Vere said all this very fast, and endeavouring to look, what he wished to be thought—a god in the business-world of Liverpool.

"But to return to Hesbia," he resumed, after a pause:

"You have means, Sir Cullender—though as you admitted to me a few days ago, not much."

"True, Mr. Vere; but I have my title."

Mr. Vere coughed—dubiously, it might have sounded to some; and certainly it did so to the large, projecting ears of the baronet, whose sloe-black eyes gave him an angry and uneasy glance, while he sharply puffed his cigar.

"And with Hesbia, as your wife——"

"Without more means than I possess," said the other, coming to the point at once, "a wife is a luxury I cannot well afford, and accustomed as Miss Vere has been, to all that wealth could give her——;"

"She shall have Blairavon at my death; and if you cast your lot with us, your title being added to the name of the firm——"

"Ah—you think it would sound well?"

"And perhaps prove a mine of gold to us; doubtless you must have found its value in your own business in London?"

"Then there is your nephew, Mr. Cheatwood," said Sir Cullender, abruptly changing the subject.

"A worthless fellow, I am sorry to say. He has no share whatever in the firm, and he is not deserving of consideration. Your business——"

"It is as a dangler after Miss Vere I mean," persisted the baronet, who always with some nervousness evaded any questions about his "business." Perhaps he was ashamed of it, as a man of title and family.

"Travice is a dangler who will not be long here, and I repeat that he is not worth considering."

"But this lad Blair is," rejoined the other, half sulkily.

"Well, perhaps, Hesbia has some friendship for him."

"Then his presence I will not tolerate," said the baronet, who seemed determined to make the most of this; "she wears a valuable bracelet of pearls, which he gave her."

"The young man is frequently my guest and her escort, when we are at home. The gift was openly given, and is openly worn, so I don't put so much weight upon that matter——"

"As he may do, Mr. Vere."

"Since the thing annoys you, Sir Cullender, I shall desire Hesbia to restore it to the donor."

"By no means; that would be attaching, perhaps, too much importance to the gift."

"You have seen her playfulness; she is still a species of child."

"At her years a child, Mr. Vere?"

"Amid the splendour your wealth and business can give her, in a year or so, she will look back on all this philandering and coquetting——"

"With regret or shame, perhaps; but meantime it won't suit me," said the baronet, with the air of annoyance which he always adopted when his mysterious business was alluded to; and this odd bearing had usually the effect of reducing Mr. Vere to silence, or perhaps it set him thinking.

"You have not yet, I believe, addressed my daughter formally?"

"I have not had a proper opportunity, and now that Mr. Blair——"

"Blair returns to Liverpool in three days," said Mr. Vere, with some asperity. "I have a little part to play with him, wishing, as you know, to possess that place named Oakwoodlee; then the whole place shall be settled on Hesbia, by a trust deed of disposition, divesting myself of it in her favour, while solvent; we never know what may occur in trade and in the money market nowadays."

"Then buy up Oakwoodlee."

"Blair won't sell it readily, I fear."

"Won't?"

"Moreover, the money-market is pretty tight just now; so I shall give him in exchange for his interest in the place a share to its full value in our business at Liverpool. Another time then, Sir Cullender, we shall go thoroughly into these matters—perhaps when I go up with you to London, where you must be equally frank with me in the details of your plans and exchequer, and the close of the year may see my daughter Lady Crowdy."

More might have passed, but Travice Cheatwood now dropped in to smoke a cigar, as he said, "before going to roost;" and as he stroked his fair moustache and smiled complacently to himself, neither Mr. Vere nor his intended son-in-law could have suspected that he had heard more of their plans and wishes than they could have desired, for Travice Cheatwood never entered a room hurriedly.

CHAPTER XVI.

A QUARTETTE.

THE unwonted occasion of guests coming to Oakwoodlee put the two faithful old servants composing the household of Lennard on their metal. Steinie went forth with his rod,

and was successful in landing a fine salmon grilse, seven pounds in weight. The recesses of the wine-binns were searched; a bottle or two of the fine old Madeira were put in the sun to air, and those of some other wine in the bucket of the deep draw-well to cool; while Elsie, with sleeves rolled up, made the most wonderful pastry, and put fowls to the spit, being careful to select as one, in the old Scottish fashion, the plump hen that sat next the cock on the roost.

Entrées, ices, camellias, champagne, and maraschino there were none in Oakwoodlee; but from his little garden Steinie produced the sweetest of green peas, the most mealy of young potatoes, luscious and tender esculents of various kinds, with strawberries to the rich cream produced by Elsie's favourite "crummie." So nature nobly supplied all that was wanting in art or decoration.

Doctor Feverley arrived first, a few minutes before six o'clock, looking a little paler than he had done on the preceding evening.

"I have had a little adventure since last night, Blair," said he.

"Not an unpleasant one, I hope?"

"This morning, about daybreak, a mounted servant came from Blairavon in haste, stating that the Lady Foster was seriously indisposed, and that Miss Vere requested me to see her immediately. That no time might be lost, I took the groom's horse, and with intense reluctance and regret, mingled with a painful longing and curiosity, galloped over to the manor-house, where I was informed that the lady declined to see me."

"Declined!"

"Yes, with many apologies. I could not reprehend her. It all passed for the whim—the sudden caprice of a fine lady. How little could Miss Vere, while pleading her excuses for disturbing me at so untimeous an hour, have surmised the real state of matters, as she stood smiling and bowing to me in the most becoming of morning dresses, edged at the sleeves and bosom with soft white lace, and her brown hair knotted hastily back over two very pretty ears, imparting to her brilliant beauty that gala look which is so characteristic of her. There is, says a writer, 'a class of women who are born to be either pets or victims,' and poor Milly has been both—a sacrifice at the two altars of Mammon and Misfortune. When I think of the wreck of her young heart, my own seems to fill with tears."

"Cheer up, Feverley. Sir Philip is an old fellow, palsied and all that; take time, she may be a widow one of these

days." Lennard Blair felt himself on the point of making some such rantipole speech as this, when, with all the rapidity of thought, he checked it, and blushed at his own bad taste. He was silent, but after a time said,—

"Come, Feverley, we shall have but a dull, little party if you begin thus. There are wines on the table and brandy on the sideboard."

But the Doctor, abstemious like his profession in general, declined both before dinner.

Lady Foster, on the plea that Sir Philip was unwell at Monkwood Moat, was leaving Blairavon for Edinburgh at that very hour. Poor Feverley was ignorant of this; and for several subsequent days spent much of his spare time in hovering about the vicinity of the avenue and lawn, in the hope of once again seeing the little boy with his nurse.

The Doctor was full of this new, or rather old, subject, and continued to relate to Lennard how, during the long and tedious dinner at Blairavon, he had watched her, and observed what others did not—her eyes cast down or looking round at times with a startled, wild, or desolate expression; at others, wistful and dreary; and how she would anon force a well-bred smile, and make attempts to reply or attend to the little nothings that were said around her; and how she seemed so girlish in appearance, that she could scarcely be thought the mother of her son, and so forth.

In the midst of these remarks, the hard, shrewd Scotch face of Steinie Hislop—who had donned his old and carefully brushed livery-coat—appeared at the door with his mouth and eyes all puckered by a broad grin, as he announced two names which seemed to tickle his fancy,—

"Mr. Dalrymple Pennyworth Dabchick and Mr. Cheatwood."

These gentlemen entered, the former attired in accurate evening dress, and the latter in his shooting-jacket; and then the usual greetings and meaningless discussion of the weather ensued prior to dinner.

Dabchick, as a very soured Scottish essayist has it, was exactly one of those "barristers of provincial education and very mediocre parts—men who, in England, *might* become Recorders or County Court Judges, but who affect to lead a party in Scotland, because Scotland has become a province, whose affairs are no longer in the hands of its aristocracy (all the better surely for Scotland!) and whose ablest men emigrate if they can."

With all his professional vanity and self-esteem, which were inordinate, in the air of Mr. Dabchick among strangers

there seemed something of always deferring—of perpetual apology—of "booing," as Sir Pertinax would call it; but this was simply the result of his training.

Cheatwood had early discovered one very weak point in the character of Dabchick,—an extreme touchiness on the subject of Scottish law; so, whenever they played, he contrived to make the little barrister nervous, furious, and even confused by vulgar ridicule of it, for his own acquisitive ends.

If Lennard's dinner, in style and equipage, was a very different affair from the one at Blairavon yesterday, there was a homely, snug, old-fashioned air about it, and the mode in which it was served, that made it a very pleasant repast, though Lennard's eye would wander at times to a certain empty elbow chair, and to a corner where an old ivory-handled cane was standing just where his father had last placed it.

An old and wall-eyed otter terrier, named "Don," long his father's faithful friend, now nestled by Lennard's chair, expectant of an occasional morsel.

Even while sharing his hospitality with Cheatwood, it was occasionally with difficulty that Lennard could preserve an unruffled aspect, when the constitutional and irrepressible impertinence of that personage became apparent.

"And you go back to Liverpool in three days, Blair?" he observed, while taking more peas to his salmon.

"In three days at furthest—back to business once more."

"Ah! you are just one of those sort of fellows who always go ahead."

"I hope so—you flatter me."

"No, I don't—not a bit; for I never knew one of your inf——your countrymen otherwise. They get into the right groove somehow, and then go forward. You'll be head of the house of Vere, Cheatwood and Co. some of these fine days, while I may enlist or hang myself—it's the *line* anyway."

"Steinie, assist Mr. Cheatwood to wine," said Lennard, colouring a little.

"You are silent, Doctor—of what are you thinking?" asked Travice.

"Of the ease and contentment that must be often brought by wealth, and are so seldom the lot of mere work and poverty."

"True; if one had a little tin, this Vale of Tears—as that old psalm-singing muff of a minister called the world yesterday—would be a very jolly place. It is the deuce to be like

me, with small means and no profession, and to be constantly trying to make a pleasant circle."

"Of what—acquaintances?"

"No—by coaxing the two ends of my income to meet; but by no human ingenuity, of mine at least, can that monetary problem be solved.

"Get a rich wife," suggested Mr. Dabchick, who was constantly on the outlook for such an investment of his own dapper person.

"A widow, or an amatory spinster of forty, if either had money, would suit me admirably; but I have never the luck to meet them."

Lennard positively hated Travice Cheatwood; but then, as Hesbia's cousin, he was disposed to conciliate and, as her rejected lover, he could afford to pity him. Still, as the evening stole on, almost every remark made by Travice jarred on Lennard's nerves, on his pet fancies or secret thoughts, and as he imbibed the fine old heady Madeira, his guest's general disposition was not improved. As he lay back in his chair and surveyed the fine and fertile landscape that stretched away beyond the grove of pines and the old Charter Stone,—

"When Sir Bernard Burke, the Ulster King-at-arms, writes a history of the *un*landed gentry, I hope he will not forget me," said Travice. "It is a fine thing to own a lump of land; people speak of the wealth of Vere and Cheatwood; but I expect, by Jove, that uncle's best and most lasting mines of wealth are those pits at—what's the absurd name of the place—Kaims of Mains, or Mains of Kaims?"

"Meaning literally 'the field of the camp.' A Roman camp stood there in the days of Julius Agricola," observed Feverley.

"Now, I should not wonder but that uncle had a shrewd notion of coal being there before he bought the estate from your father, Blair."

"I think that scarcely possible, Mr. Cheatwood."

"Ah—you don't know him as I do."

"You are of a singularly suspicious nature," said Feverley, smiling.

"And perhaps with reason."

"Why?"

"I don't know; but I believe that very few things are done in this world for the causes assigned to them; and you, Dabchick, as a lawyer, must know that deuced well. Under the surface of life lies a stratum of concealed thought which no man can see in his neighbour."

"Of course, that may be," assented Doctor Feverley.

"Every man plays a double game in this world—a secret and an open one; and it is fools alone who let others see the cards they hold.'

"A dark and unpleasant distrust this, surely?" said Lennard.

"Unpleasant?"

"Yes—for yourself."

"But useful; I have lived a little longer than you, Blair, in this nothing-for-nothing world, and perhaps know its crooked ways better—that is all."

Whatever was the train of angry thoughts that passed through the cynical and mischievous mind of Cheatwood, his companions could only see that there was a cruel and malevolent expression on his thin lips and in his cold, cunning eye, as Feverley afterwards said, "A most hateful aspect to read in the face of a man who had the most part of life yet before him."

"There may be some truth in what you say," said Lennard, "yet I have been struck by a writer who remarks, 'How little do we know of the hearts of others, and how readily do we prate about seeing through a man, when, in truth, what we see is but a surface, and the image conveyed to our mind but the reflection of *ourselves*.' You do not, then, think much of the world at large?" added Lennard, laughing.

"Neither then nor now," was the surly rejoinder; "and I don't expect much from its candour or generosity."

"Come, come, Cheatwood," exclaimed Lennard, pushing the decanters towards the speaker, "you are turning quite a cynic; fill your glass, and be jolly. Life I know to be a game of leapfrog at best."

"Yes," responded Cheatwood, his large tongue rendering his voice still more displeasing as his secret irritation grew upon him; "but I shall never, if I can help it, be the one who stoops his back to his fellows." And, with a forced laugh, he filled his glass and held it between him and the light of the setting sun to test the brilliant hue of the wine. Then, though all unconscious of it, his next remark drew upon him a very deliberate scowl from Steinie Hislop, who, having removed the cloth, was replenishing the wine-decanters. "By the way, Blair, I'd have that great upright block, which looks very like as if it had been stolen from Stonehenge—the Charter Stone, I think you call it,—blown up or broken down for road metal."

"For what reason?"

"Because it must stand right in the way of the plough."

"We have never ploughed that pieee of land."

"Others may, some day; moreover, it is most unsightly—positively hideous!"

"Well—it may only be the assoeiation of ideas or custom, but it does not seem so to me. Those great Druidical monoliths that stand here and there all over the land are ealculated to inspire the reflective mind with many solemn thoughts of all the mighty changes and the generations of men they have survived. Moreover," added Lennard, with a little laugh and almost with a blush, as if ashamed of the admission to a sneerer, "through an old tradition, we believed it to be inseparably eonneeted with our existence as a family, so mueh so, that an aneestor of mine was onee very nearly adopting it as a erest, in lieu of the stag's head *caboshed*."

"Bosh, indeed!" exclaimed Cheatwood, with the first genuine laugh he had enjoyed that evening,; "when that far-travelled individual, 'the intelligent foreigner,' or the 'New Zealander,' to whom the newspaper snobs always appeal or refer, eomes this way, won't they stare a bit to see such things believed in ——"

"Nay—talked about."

"Well—even talked about, in these days of progress. To be praetical men, as you think yourselves, you Scotsmen are sometimes very sentimental donkeys, with many sympathies and superstitions that are all of a pre-railway age. But now, that dinner is over and wine on the table, suppose we eut in for a quiet little rubber at whist—crown points, say?"

"Impossible for me," said Feverlcy, looking at his watch; "I beg your pardon, Blair; but I'm almost due at the village—have a patient to see; I shall be back within an hour—you'll hold me excused."

"Certainly, my dear fellow—return as soon as you can, and light a cigar ere you go; there are some prime Havannahs in that box."

The Doetor retired, with a eovert glance at Lennard to be wary in his play.

"Now, Mr. Dabchiek," said Lennard, "as playing whist with a dummy is always slow work, I shall smoke a cigar alone, while you and Mr. Cheatwood take to cards if you choose."

"All right," replied Cheatwood, "only I hate to play while an idler looks on. (He had his own privatc reasons for this strange dislike!) But now, Dab, to give you a chance of revenge, suppose we eut in for écarté?'

"What do you mean by revenge?" stammered Mr. Dabchick.

"You know that I have your I.O.U. for a cool fifty pounds —perhaps you may win it back again."

Poor Dabchick gave a sickly smile; he could but ill afford to take up that obnoxious paper, and had, he feared, but a slender chance of regaining it from such a sharp player as Travice Cheatwood; so a cold perspiration came over him. How many pages of his guinea per column work for the local papers, with his other perquisite, the sale at half-price to the libraries of the London books wasted for provincial reviews—a trick of the country press—would be required to cover that sum; for he was one of the three hundred and fifty unbriefed of his fraternity, so the consideration was a serious one!

A hectic crossed his face, and he was about to give his place to Lennard, but, somehow, before he knew how it all came about, he found himself opposite the inexorable Cheatwood at a little side-table; while Lennard, thinking of how he could contrive to have an interview with Hesbia on the morrow, sat in a window apart from them, solely intent, apparently, on rolling up and smoking a succession of tiny cigarettes.

CHAPTER XVII.

ÉCARTÉ.

ENTIRELY anxious to win, Cheatwood played with great caution, and with his glass stuck in his eye. He had made up what he conceived to be a sure and lucrative book on both the Derby and the Oaks, and in both instances had he lost! Hence the origin of that bitterness of spirit which he had displayed during dinner. Money he must make now at all hazards, and he valued Blair, Feverley, and Dabchick at —not much—but about fifty pounds each at an average. More he did not expect to get out of them by any ingenuity.

Having sufficient food for his own thoughts, Lennard sat smoking in the open window, gazing out on the beautiful landscape that stretched away towards the base of the green Pentlands, steeped in the splendour of sunset, and for a time he gave no heed to the two players, till the odd way in which they were managing this very rooking game attracted his attention. Dabchick was considerably flushed or pale by turns. He had already lost several games and as many pounds; and found himself further than ever from recovering that obnoxious I.O.U.

Travice Cheatwood was always overbearing and insolent, even to equals; so that to subordinates or inferiors his bearing was singularly offensive. Dabchick he viewed as a species of "muff," and thus made him a regular butt, but always in an undertoned way. Perhaps it was that he had a bad hand, or that Cheatwood had contrived to sting him, by vulgar banter, on their favourite subject of discussion—the comparative merits of the law of the two countries; but when Lennard turned to the card-table, the game was being conducted in this fashion:—

"I won't exchange my cards this time, Dab, old boy," said Cheatwood.

"Then I score double for the tricks."

"Of course; mild play this; but as I was saying about your Scotch law—only look at its phrases now! How does the panel appear when the diet against him is deserted *simpliciter?* very queer, I suppose?"

"What do you call a puisne judge, and how does he look when he is sitting in Error?" retorted Dabchick.

"How the deuce should I know? I'm not a lawyer, thank God! What do *you* mean by a double-gowned senator of the college of justice, and how does *he* look when he takes a case to avizandum—wherever that may be?"

"You surely don't know Latin, sir!"

"Nor you Norman French!"

"No—nor Choctaw nor Cherokee—where would be the use? I mark the king—the card is in your hand—*Je propose.*"

"Then what do you Scotch lawyers mean by—— !"

"Don't argue with me, please," urged Dabchick, against whom game after game went dead and surely, for his adversary could talk away on any subject, and yet be all the while intent on his points and counters; "bother Scotland and her laws! I don't set up for a patriot,—none of us do."

"It doesn't pay you Scotch legal prigs to be so; but some day I hope you will get rid of your mediæval law jargon."

"I don't know what you call jargon," replied Dabchick, becoming seriously ruffled; "but I consider the legal phraseology of our courts quite as classical and comprehensive as any used in the south; to wit, what on earth is meant by such terms as prochein amy, trover, replevin, formedon, ne unques, and accouple?"

"Words to raise the wind, if not the devil, certainly," said Lennard, thinking it time to interfere, and laughing at the odd manner in which they were managing their game of écarté.

"I have won that trick, Dab."

"Play another card, please—this is our last game, remember."

The tricks were rapidly played out, and when Dabchick rose from the table he was minus twenty pounds. This was not a great sum; but as things are comparative, when added to the I O U it was sufficient to render Dabchick wretched.

As the game had gone on, the reason why Travice Cheatwood "hated to play" with an idler by became painfully apparent to the astonished and indignant Lennard Blair. With a darkening brow and a louring eye he approached the table, and the general expression of his face could not fail to arrest the attention of Mr. Cheatwood when he looked up, and, while shuffling the cards, asked if *he* had "any objection to a little mild play."

"Decidedly I have; I never gamble—don't like it," was the blunt response, "yet, now that I think, I shall have a little écarté with you."

What Lennard had observed during the play between Dabchick and Cheatwood was known only to himself; he had seen enough, however, to convince him that Master Travice—to use plain language—was sharping! He was enraged that such trickery should be practised in his own house, and all his smothered dislike of Cheatwood glowed to fever heat.

"How much to the point?" asked Cheatwood.

"Guinea points," replied Lennard, emptying a large glass of cool claret at the sideboard.

"Agreed."

"You look flushed, Mr. Dabchick."

"The evening is warm," sighed the poor lawyer, who was perspiring with irrepressible vexation.

"Try a glass of claret," said Lennard; "there is some magnificent old port there—vintage '47—a favourite old dry wine of my father's. Or will you smoke a cigar outside till Feverley comes, and then we shall have our rubber? He can't be long absent now—he might have bled and blistered all the people in Blairavon, rogues included, by this time."

"Shall we divide for the deal?" asked Cheatwood, who was all eagerness to begin.

"Have you prepared the pack?"

"Yes—would you like to see for yourself?" he asked, while running his fingers through his goatee beard, with a fidgety air.

"No, sir—I don't suspect you; and here I see are all the twos, threes, fives, and sixes."

To decide the deal, the cards were cut at the commencement of the game, and the lowest card fell to Cheatwood, who dealt, and, as usual—won.

The deal then fell to Lennard, who played and lost again. Several games were played by them, but after the third Lennard had no more luck. Still, he seemed in no way discomposed; he whistled, and talked on indifferent subjects—the last Derby—Hesbia's style of playing—the extreme beauty of the evening, which had now given place to night, and Steinie had lighted candles; and ever and anon Lennard—to the manifest annoyance of Cheatwood—would stoop to pat and caress his father's otter terrier, Don, which lay under the table.

"Let us double the stakes," said Cheatwood.

"With pleasure," replied Lennard, who rose to assist himself to another glass of claret at the sideboard; but as he had early been taught that a card-player should have at least four eyes, he made such good use of the two given him by nature that he distinctly saw Cheatwood, who was dealing, give himself *eight* cards, and skilfully contrive to drop three of these, till he could, by letting fall his handkerchief, or some other ruse, return them to the pack.

There was a heavy score against Lennard now, a decided hole would soon be made in the £100 he had brought with him from Liverpool, or, rather, in what remained of that sum; but he reseated himself with an air of unconcern, just as Feverley and Dabchick, who had been smoking outside, entered the room. By this time he was forty pounds in debt to Cheatwood.

"Still deep in écarté, Blair, eh?"

"Yes; rather too deep."

"It's a game I don't like."

"Nor I, Doctor; but I'm playing for a purpose."

Cheatwood knit his brows, and darted a keen glance at the speaker, who was whistling again.

"What are you about, sir? is the terrier annoying you?" asked Lennard, sternly, as Cheatwood secured one of his dropped cards.

"I let a card fall, the king of trumps, by Jove! That scores one trick; play on, please."

"You dropped a card, did you?"

"Yes—awkwardly."

"You have dropped half the pack, throughout the evening; there are a whole handful of cards below the table, now!"

"Impossible; d—nation, what do you mean?" he demanded.

"Look, gentlemen, Feverley and Dabchick, look here," cried Lennard, furiously, as he tore aside the tablecloth, and there certainly were several cards seen lying close to the feet of Travice Cheatwood, who grew pale, dangerously pale, but who still sought to brazen the matter out.

"Cards are there, certainly," he stammered; "but how the deuce they came there, I am completely at a loss to understand."

"How is one to say an unpleasant thing in pleasant language?" asked Lennard, grimly.

"Why?"

"Because I am about to accuse you——"

"Of what, sir; of what?"

"Cheating and card-sharping; is that plain?"

"I repeat that I know nothing about these cards; on my honour, I do!"

"Honour—a card-dropper, a rascally sharper, talks of his honour!"

"When you have quite done blowing off the steam, Mr. Blair, perhaps I may talk to you," said Travice, rising as if to withdraw, a ghastly glare in his light green eyes; "till then——"

"Do you take me for a child, or a fool?" demanded Lennard, starting between him and the door. "At least ten times this evening I have seen you drop your cards, and now that I have exposed you——"

"What do you mean to do? kick up a row, eh?" asked Travice.

"I give you the choice of leaving the house by the door, or a window. Up with the sash, Dabchick," said Lennard, giving full swing to his pent-up dislike, and heedless even of what Hesbia or Mr. Vere might think.

"I shall prefer the door," replied Cheatwood, calmly, but with a terrible expression in his cold and cunning eye.

"You are wise."

"I am one to three."

"I would not willingly assault a man in my own house, even though he had sought to disgrace it by his conduct; but there is one little piece of business to be transacted ere you go, Mr. Cheatwood."

"To the point, sir; what is it?"

"You have won twenty pounds from Mr. Dabchick, this evening; but while the discovery of your misconduct cancels that debt of honour, it renders it necessary that you re-

turn his I O U for £50 now in your possession. I give you three minutes by that clock to do so, and if, at the end of that time, it is not given up, by the Heaven that hears me, I shall break every bone in your skin, and toss you head foremost out of the window!"

Lennard's aspect was stern, resolute, and he seemed every-way capable of putting his ugly threat in execution.

Cheatwood looked at him with a white gleam of malice and hate in his eyes; then an attempted smile of derision spread over his face, as he deliberately opened his pocket-book, tossed the document to Dabchick (who nervously and instantly tore it to shreds), and with an ironical bow left the room, and quitted the house, whistling the last street tune, but leaving an indescribable chill on the hearts of the three, more especially on that of Lennard, whose sudden gust of anger soon evaporated.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CROWDY OF THAT ILK.

"I THINK that a quiet glass of grog will not be unacceptable after this unseemly shindy, and in such a hot night, too," said Lennard, ringing the bell for Steinie; "I never was engaged in such a thing before, and I would to Heaven that it had happened anywhere else than in my own house," he added, as he thought of the future, and they drew their chairs round the table, on which Steinie placed glasses, and the liqueur-frame.

"He'll be for calling you out," said Feverley, laughing.

"Bah! if he does, I shall not go. The days for such things are luckily past; and even in the days when they were not past, one wasn't obliged to go out with a swindler and card-sharper."

"He'll work you mischief somehow, if he can," lisped Dabchick, who looked far from easy in his mind, and apprehensive, he knew not of what.

"Mischief, likely enough," replied Lennard, as he thought of Hesbia Vere, and how much power his tie of cousinship and residence at Blairavon gave him.

Mr. Dabchick felt greatly relieved from monetary embarrassment by the turn affairs had taken, in the restoration and destruction of his I O U, and the cancelling of the further debt of honour, and being grateful to Lennard, made many mental vows to eschew écarté for ever.

"By Jove! never was present at such a scene!" said he, after a pause; "Doctor, what did the fellow look like, when Blair taxed him as a cheat?"

"Like a patient seated in a dentist's chair, anything but pleasant," replied the Doctor, mixing a glass of grog. "Peter Pindar says that we should

> Mind what we read in godly books,
> And *not* take people by their looks.

But his features bear the double stamp of open insolence and secret dishonesty."

"And then the expression of his eyes as he gave up that wretched paper of mine!"

"Yes; a graveyard in a winter's day, is a jolly sight when compared thereto; but his eyes were full of dangerous hate."

"Hate? I hope to be able to defy him in anyway," said Blair, who had been sitting in silence and full of disagreeable thoughts. "If his uncle knew of to-night's work, he could, of course, no longer tolerate his presence at Blairavon. It would injure Mr. Vere in the estimation of his friend the baronet, with whom he has evidently every desire to stand well."

A strange expression, a very peculiar kind of smile that stole over the weak features of Dabchick and twinkled in his sore-looking eyes, made Lennard say,—

"Talking of Sir Cullender, by the way, I do not find his name, arms, or family recorded in any of the 'Baronetages' of Nova Scotia or Great Britain, and I have looked ever so far back."

"Pooh, my dear fellow!" said the little advocate, whose tongue was loosened by the good wine he had drunk, and whose heart was full of gratitude for the recent release from his double obligation to a card-sharper; "the whole affair is a dodge, a sham—a humbug!"

"What—the title?"

"Yes—the assumption of it, at least."

"How—I cannot comprehend this?"

"The fact is, that the man himself is, as you may see, a London Jew; his blood as old as Abraham's perhaps, but not a drop of it Scotch for all that."

"Do, please, explain all this enigma," urged Feverley, for Lennard was completely mystified.

"My friend little Mark Shoddy, the sheriff of a Scotch county, told me all about it," continued the dapper advocate, imbibing his grog with great relish; "the baronet is one of the most singular dodgers I ever met. He was once thread-

bare in London—thankful for something less even than a five pound note; but he invented, or pretended to invent—it is all the same at times—some useless necessity, which he had patented; so a company was formed under that remarkable system so favourable to schemers, the Limited Liability Act. A board was appointed with a fussy secretary and a fat and respectable looking president. There was an office with a board-room and secretary's-room, carpeted with brown cocoa-nut matting, and hung with highly glazed maps, mysterious diagrams, and gaudy prospectuses; there were chairs upholstered in crimson leather, flywire window blinds with gilded letters, high desks and ditto chairs, and big ledgers and daybooks with flaming red edges. So he whose linen had long been represented by a paper collar and a dickey at most—both turned at times—who had haunted low taverns at the East-end of London and dined on a greasy chop with a pot of beer, or on a biscuit with a refreshing draught of pump-water—he, Benjamin Cullender Crowdy—soon came forth in a new guise—a phœnix arisen from its ashes—a caterpillar expanded to a butterfly, with a house at the West-end and a villa at Richmond, with vineries and pits for ice and forcing; a deer forest in the Highlands, and a snipe bog in Ireland, though he neither stalked in one nor shot in the other; cellars with something better in the binns than cobwebs and dust; a box at the opera and a well-hung carriage; but then, my dear sirs, you are aware that we live in an age of progress, and it is a great country this!"

"This?" queried the Doctor, "which do you mean—Scotland or England?"

"I mean both, for knaves and hypocrites flourish in both, with a success quite bewildering."

"But *what* is his particular business?" asked Lennard.

"That is just what no fellow can understand," replied Dabchick; "but we all know that he is Chairman of the Great Anglo-Saxon Beef and Mutton Company; President of the Imperial, Life, Loan, and Lucifer-match Office, and Extraordinary Director of the Royal Joint-Stock Company for something else, and that he is connected with heaven knows how many more 'limited' affairs."

"If such is your view of this person, why do you continue to reside with him at Blairavon?" asked Lennard somewhat gravely, for these revelations shocked and disgusted him.

"Mr. Vere is about to have a dispute concerning a right of way to his coal pits at the Kaims, and my legal advice is necessary; I expect to be retained in the case by Soaper and Sawmsinger, W.S., his Edinburgh agents," replied poor

Dabchick, colouring, for he was of the many unbriefed, as we have said.

"But how about the baronetey?" persisted Lennard, who thought that he was forgetting, or wandering from that part of the subject.

"That is the greatest dodge—the most elever stroke of all!" replied Dabehiek, laughing.

"I cannot understand—he succeeded of course?" asked Lennard.

"I shall explain to you all about it; but first tell me if there is any dormant or defunct Blair baronetcy?"

"I don't know."

"The more is the pity."

"What matter—and why?"

"Because you might beeome Sir Lennard Blair to-morrow after the fashion of Crowdy of that Ilk. My friend Sheriff Shoddy—a great authority on family history and cavalier biographies is little Mark—about a year ago had a petition presented to him by a merehant of London, designating himself Sir Cullender Crowdy of that Ilk, for general serviee to Sir Ronald Crowdy of Crowdymoudy, Knight Baronet, who died in 1650, for the purpose of taking up the title. Shoddy, like a sharp lawyer, ordered proof of propinquity to be given; these proofs, of eourse, were never forthcoming; but Sir Cullender at onee assumed the title, and had it duly engraved on his eards and on most gorgeous brass at his place of business in the city. Clever stroke that, was it not?"

"Mr. Vere should be told of all this," said Lennard, full of astouishment and indignation at the imposture.

"It is not my part, or my interest either, to injure a favourite guest in his estimation, especially as the man's wealth seems undoubted."

"Well, then, Hesbia—Miss Vere, I mean——"

"Oh, she, of eourse, eannot be supposed to understand the dodge of the title—perhaps doesn't wish to do so," was the signifieant and half-spiteful addition.

"You have tried to enlighten her, perhaps?"

"Not exaetly," replied the lawyer, carelessly; but reddening under the searehing eyes of Lennard; "thus, as I have told you, Crowdy is a London Jew to the baekbone. Of eourse, the Crowdys of what's-its-name were an old Lowland family."

"How eame he to know about them?"

"Probably when searching for a erest—every snob must have his bit of heraldry on his pasteboard now, and many

a crest is there that never shone on a helmet in the line of battle—he had seen that the baronetcy is stated to have been *extinct* since 1650, when the last of the Crowdys was killed by the English at the battle of Inverkeithing; but its extinction exactly suited Sir Cullender."

"This ought to be exposed," said Lennard, with growing anger; "it is an impudent humbug—an infamous assumption."

"I think it a great joke. The line has been defunct for two centuries; but whose personal interest is it to expose the bosh, the sham of the thing, or to insist that, after two hundred years of obscurity as hewers of wood and drawers of water, the affinity, even if it actually existed, could be proved?"

"The Garter-king should interfere."

"He has no power whatever in Scotland, and our Lord Lyon is abolished, so people may play what pranks they please in the matter of arms and heraldry."

All this was a new view of the law of succession which rather bewildered Feverley and his host; but, as the night was far advanced now, they separated. Doctor Feverley rode off to the village, and Mr. Dabchick returned to Blairavon, escorted a portion of the way—as he felt nervous among the woodlands—by Lennard, who extracted from him a promise that he would not mention what had transpired lest it might pain and mortify Miss Vere.

The dapper lawyer promised this all the more readily as he was to leave Blairavon on the morrow for Edinburgh, giving Lennard—whom he was quite aware would return to Liverpool in three days—a pressing invitation to "look him up soon," adding, as the address of his "rooms," a good style of street, but omitting to add how many more of the faculty chummed with him in the same house, for the sake of economy and appearances, seeing the gaietics of life, through the medium of the "free list," and being the "utility men" of a penny daily—for in too many instances to such small fry as these has the once brilliant bar of Scotland sunk.

CHAPTER XIX.

COME TO ME.

NEXT morning when seated alone in the breakfast parlour, Lennard lingered over his morning meal, and left his newspaper untouched and unent. The freshest of eggs, the

thickest of cream, pickled salmon grilse, and cakes of barleymeal—Elsie's own baking—with heather honey and so forth, remained nearly untasted and forgotten by Lennard.

Last night's row and its contingent revelations were uppermost in his thoughts, and the whole affair in all its details and suggestive suspicions proved a source of much distress and disgust to him. Though always distrustful of Travice Cheatwood, he had never thought him a positive swindler, yet the gambling of last night had proved him to be so; and of what other treachery was not such a man capable?

When the figure of Travice came before his mind's eye, notwithstanding his insolent brusquerie, his general accuracy of toilet, his careful evening suit of black with silk facings, cuffs and studs, and primrose-coloured gloves—his perfection of a tie, a bouquet at his button-hole, his laced shirt and well-waxed moustache—more than all, when he thought of him as the cousin of Hesbia, he would ask of himself—"Have I been rash and harsh—*can* I have mistaken him?" And then the stern conviction that he had done right, and right only, came fully and forcibly upon him.

Lennard could not, while he was at Blairavon, and after all that had occurred, visit the Veres, even before departing for Liverpool.

That Mr. Vere should encourage attentions by a character so doubtful as Mr. Dabchick represented "the baronet" to be, caused to the young lover the keenest mortification; it roused a spirit of honourable and honest resentment, and gave him a serious and most unpleasant doubt of Vere himself—Vere, the man he had hitherto looked upon as the mirror of integrity. With all this, he felt pity, too, for Hesbia.

He would seek Dabchick once more. Starting, he looked at his watch, and found that by that time the little lawyer was being bowled homeward along the Edinburgh and Glasgow Line, or at that moment was probably cooling his heels, and calculating the limits of human patience, at the Carstairs Junction, amid its Surbonian bog, if he went by the other route; and Lennard smiled to himself, as he thought of poor Dabchick's pressing but hazy offers of uncertain hospitality.

Ere leaving Oakwoodlee, he felt the necessity of seeing Hesbia at least once more, and alone, to end his own doubts, and to warn her of the baronet's unsound character, even at the risk of apparent jealousy. But he resolved not to mention the doings of Travice Cheatwood, lest he might thereby

wound her feelings, for she had pride enough to be sensitive on a point of family honour.

"Oh, Hesbia!" thought he, "had you a brother to be your father's heir, or were you the heiress of something less than his enormous fortune, I might love you openly, and propose to you fearlessly; but as it is—alas! alas! poor devil that I am!"

Music, flowers, fans, and books, her silky silver-haired Skye terrier, little Fussy, he had given her, and even presents of more value, such as the pearl bracelet, and such as few girls would have accepted from a mere dangler; but all these she had taken with a brilliant smile and the prettiest words of thanks—taken as a matter of course; though he meant each and all for much more than that—each and all, the titles of songs and music, the subjects of selected books, and so forth, to have an import and significance that Hesbia, coquette as she was, could not fail to understand.

He hurried over his breakfast, and was about to open his desk for the purpose of writing to her, when old Stephen Hislop entered the room in a state of high excitement, his wrinkled cheeks and almost toothless jaws quivering with anger.

"Did you hear a shot near the house this morning, Mr. Lennard?" he asked, holding up his hands, which were stained with blood.

"Some boys firing at the wood-pigeons, probably—but near the house, you say. A shot—when?"

"Within these ten minutes, I should think."

"No; but why do you ask—has anything happened?"

"Poor old Don has been shot!"

"Where?" asked Lennard, starting up.

"Close by the yett in the hedge—the yett near the highway; I found the puir animal bleeding on the gravel wi' a bullet in its body, just through the loins, and have carried it here."

As Don had been an old, faithful, and favourite retainer of his father—a present from Ranald Cheyne too—Lennard fully shared the indignation and concern of Steinie, whom he followed to the entrance-hall, where Elsie was pouring forth her commiseration over the dog, which had just died, for the blood was still oozing from the wound in its loins.

"Most singular it is that we heard no report. Are you certain that the poor dog was shot so near the house?"

"Quite certain, Master Lennard," replied Steinie, who, from old habit, still viewed the head of the Blairs as a boy or a youth. "There was a little pool of blood where I

found it, but not a drop elsewhere. Don lay where the shot had stricken him down, for I heard his sudden cry of pain, and went to the spot instanter, and there he was, wallowing in his death agony, and biting the gravel, puir beastie!"

"And no one was near with a gun?"

"Gun or not, there was no report—the dog fell as if elf-shot!"

"A most extraordinary circumstance!"

"Exactly what Mr. Cheatwood said," added Steinie.

"Was *he* there?"

"He was passing along the road at the moment I heard poor Don's terrible cry."

"And had he not a gun or other firearm?" asked Lennard, with darkening face.

"Nothing in his hand but a thick walking-staff."

"Go to the police station, and offer a reward for the discovery of the offender, and get, if you can, the bullet with which the poor dog was killed."

Lennard was seriously concerned for this sudden death of an old household pet, and felt extreme exasperation against the unknown perpetrator of an outrage so wanton. The bullet was brought to him by Steinie; it was conical, with a little wooden plug for expansion, and in size was something smaller than those used for the ordinary Enfield rifles. It retained no odour of powder, or appearance of having been *fired;* but the blood amid which it had been imbedded might have washed those signs away.

Lest it might be required in evidence, Lennard put it carefully by in his desk, while Steinie buried the terrier under a moss-grown stone seat in the garden, where, for many a year in the soft summer evenings, and in those of the ruddy autumn, he had nestled beside the feet of his departed master; and old Hislop sighed and shook his white locks, muttering the while to himself, as those well on in years will do, as he hung on a nail in the parlour, among similar relics (such as bits, spurs, and the shoes of favourite hunters, that had long since passed from the sand-cart to the knacker's-yard), the little chain collar of the "auld master's otter terrier."

Of the somewhat trivial affair of the dog's death, the great lumbering rural police could make nothing; so Lennard's reward was proffered at the turnpikes in vain; but there came a time when it was regarded as an important evidence in another matter.

Though greatly ruffled by this incident, with which he

somehow mingled the idea of Travice Cheatwood, the thoughts of Lennard soon reverted to their former channel, and having but two days now to spare, he reopened his desk and pondered, pen in hand, on the fashion in which he was to address Miss Vere.

He had grown painfully sensible that, though still made welcome at the house of her father—though still free as of old to make presents of tickets, flowers, bouquets, and graceful trifles to Hesbia, and frequently to be her escort—that, as the baronet (whom he had never met before) became more intimate, she had grown more sisterly—at times even more distant in her bearing towards him.

To Lennard this was intolerable, after all the early years of pleasant intercourse and the terms on which they were.

If, from among her friends, Hesbia had been compelled to make choice of a husband, then Lennard Blair, by his handsome face and figure, his winning manners, and general air of distinction—their past companionship, and so forth, would undoubtedly have had the preference; but, then, he was poor, and she—in some respects—was not much better, being completely dependent on the will of her father.

Wealth and luxury, with all their pleasant concomitants, were as necessary to Hesbia's existence as air or sunshine. Her father's wealth was—she knew, and often had he told her so—liable to the sudden crashes, failures, and contingencies of trade; so she paused ere she let her heart go *quite* out of her own keeping.

On the other hand, Lennard reflected: why should not he as well as any other man marry Hesbia, and so realize the golden dream of his poor father's deathbed—the restoration of the Blairavon lands and manor-house to the old line of Blair. Better it seemed that he should become its proprietor—bred as he was to trade, cautious, and steady—than a person like Sir Cullender, or it might be some penniless and spendthrift peer.

Business training had made Lennard Blair careful and thrifty; the experience gained at the desk in Liverpool would be eminently useful at home. Then with the brilliant Hesbia for his wife, how happily would time glide away at Blairavon. All the future would be but an anticipated part of Paradise.

Intimate though he was with Hesbia Vere, on *this* occasion Lennard wasted a dozen sheets of note-paper ere he schemed out a few lines to the effect that, owing to an unpleasant affair which had taken place at his house last night he was unable to visit Blairavon while Mr. Travice Cheat-

wood resided there ; and, as he had to start for Liverpool in two days, he begged that she would grant him an interview that he might take leave of her alone, as he had much to explain. "*Come to me* at any hour or place you may name, for there I shall be waiting," he wrote, and concluded by imploring her to do so, as, on reaching Liverpool, he would probably have to go at once and for an indefinite period to South America.

"If I possess any real interest in her eyes or in her heart, this must surely rouse it," thought he.

"My dear Miss Vere," he added in a postscript, "you may write me a note *so worded*, that even if it falls into the hands of another, its true meaning will not be understood."

Lennard had an eye to Cheatwood when he wrote thus ; but when he had sealed up the note, he found that his *fidus Achates*, Steinie, had gone out in search of a salmon grilse, for the good old fellow was never idle. So Lennard went forth himself in search of a fitting messenger to take his missive to the great house—one upon whom he could depend for placing it safely in Hesbia's hands.

He had not proceeded far along the highway bordering the closely-mown and smoothly-rolled lawn of Blairavon, when the sound of merry voices led him to look through the closely clipped beech hedge, and there he could see Cheatwood with Hesbia and the two Miss Cheynes, mallet in hand, and all intent on croquet, the girls becomingly dressed in summer hats and white piqués.

"Heavens !" thought he ; "if old Ranald Cheyne knew the real character of the fellow his girls are playing with !"

And now, as chance would have it, he overtook Mademoiselle Savonette, Hesbia's French maid, with whom he had the good fortune to be an especial favourite. She was a handsome, dark girl, with a bright and pleasing expression, rather ladylike in her dress and bearing, but with strongly-defined eyebrows, and a slight indication of a moustache darkening her upper lip, particularly in the corners of her curved and very pretty mouth.

"Good morning, m'sieu," said she, with her thick, French burr, bowing and smiling ; "are you going to join miladi and the demoiselles at croquet ?"

"No, mademoiselle," he replied, "I am unfortunately pressed for time, and leave this to-morrow for England."

"So soon !—and we have seen so leetle, oh so ver' leetle of you at the château yonder !"

"Ah, you will see still less, I fear, my good friend Savonette ; but will you do me a favour ?"

"A thousand if I can—m'sieu is always so ver' polite to me."

"Give this note to Miss Vere on the earliest opportunity, and bring me the reply, if you can do so with convenience; if not, post or send it."

"I shall have ze greatest gratification, m'sieu," replied Savonette, almost blushing with pleasure at what seemed to savour of a good share in an intrigue. "Tres bon! tres bon!" she added, as she pocketed the note together with the sovereign which Lennard adroitly left in her hand as he kissed and pressed it; and then, lifting his hat to the pretty soubrette, walked back to Oakwoodlee, very well pleased with the first stage of matters.

How little could he foresee all that was to follow, and that, instead of departing for Liverpool, the morrow would find him still at Oakwoodlee!

CHAPTER XX.

TRAVICE RE-OPENS THE TRENCHES.

THE event of the preceding evening and other discoveries that were certain to be made in the fulness of time, rendered Travice Cheatwood as thoughtful and dull over his croquet as Lennard Blair had been over his breakfast. Even Hesbia's high-arched instep displayed from time to time upon a ball, exhibiting the dainty kid boot, the smooth white stocking, over a lovely and tapering ankle, could not lure him to forget the devil that occupied his heart.

The minds of both gentlemen were occupied by the same object, though they regarded her from two very different points of view. Travice was desperately resolved to make one more effort to secure her love—or that which he valued much more, her hand—as a protection to himself amid discoveries that were inevitable, and to insure a right over whatever she might possess.

His more immediate troubles were likely to arise from a "kite"—one of those "little bills" which he was incessantly having "done," and very often to the undoing of others; and his failure in rooking Lennard and the other two would prevent him meeting this when it fell due—a circumstance which inflamed his fury against his detector.

The croquet, a game which he loathed from its extreme slowness, and luncheon, too—perhaps the most pleasant meal in a country-house—were both over. Mr. Vere was

writing to Mr. Envoyse, in the library, for he possessed one, though he never read anything beyond "Bradshaw," the *Times'* money article, or the *Mark Lane Express*. The baronet was inditing one or two telegrams for London; the Cheyne girls were in the drawing-room, trying over the excruciating Tannhauser overture; and, to the extreme astonishment and satisfaction of Travice, he was invited by Hesbia to accompany her on an exploring expedition through a portion of the house in which she had never been before, so the colour mounted to his usually pale cheek, and his heart —or that which passed for such—beat quicker and more lightly.

"Everything in this world is a fluke," said he, "so here goes!"

The part of the manor-house through which they proceeded was one that had remained almost untouched in its architecture or furniture during at least three generations of the Blairavon family, and it seemed, in fact, to be a series of lumber-closets or queer corridors, and little wainscoted chambers, with one or two turret stairs, and steps up, and steps down, where shins might be broken and skirts torn; little windows were there, thickly grated with iron and half darkened by intervowen cobwebs and depending ivy or the upper branches of the old trees without, giving a dubious light to these places, while there was about them a dusty, damp, and mouldy odour, which seemed to be emitted by the old lumber lying forgotten there, such as square-backed chairs of the Covenanting times, covered with tapestry or faded Utrecht velvet; tripod tables or gueridons of buhl and ebony of the days of James VII.; Chinese screens and japan cabinets of the First and Second Georges,—and Hesbia wandered among this chaos as if she had penetrated into a hitherto unknown and uninhabited land. The girl had taste enough to be delighted.

"Oh! Travice," she exclaimed, her brown eyes sparkling with pleasure, "when next we act charades, won't these things come splendidly in for scenery?"

"Some of old Blairavon's Wardour Street antiquities, I suppose," grumbled Travice; yet among these faded relics were some of the household *lares* of old Richard Blair; "a beastly old hole," continued Travice; "but we are alone in it any way. Save for you, Hesbia, I would soon cut this deadly lively den and be off by the first express train for the south."

"But for me?" she exclaimed, as she seated herself in one of the old tapestry chairs, from which the moths flew out as

she did so; "surely I do nothing to hamper your movements or to alter your plans, whatever they may be."

"You alike order and derange the whole progress of my life, Hesbia."

"Traviee, I don't deal in paradoxes."

"May I repeat again, how dearly I love you?" he said in an earnest whisper.

"Pray don't, Travice; it becomes stale, flat, and unprofitable from unimpassioned repetition."

"Indeed!" said he through his clenched teeth.

"There is plenty of love on your tongue, but not a trace of it in your eyes; so pray do not attempt to act the part," she replied, laughing. "With my hair powdered over a toupee and a Pompadour dress, wouldn't I make a picture in this old chair, with my dimpled elbow on that buhl table and the Japan eabinet behind? Then you might come in as my adorer—a Sir Charles Grandison or a Seottish eavalier—at my feet."

"Hesbia," he continued, keeping down his wrath, coming as close to her as he dared, and leaning over her as he lowered his voiee, "I shall get a special license by return of post, and ——"

"What are you talking about, Travice?" said she, with one of her merriest and most musieal bursts of laughter. "You forget that, even if you had a bride, which you have *not*, so far as I am concerned, a license from the Archbishop of Canterbury would be as useless here as a cheque on the Bank of Elegance."

"Why?"

"Beeause we are in Seotland."

Though desperation and monetary diffieulties imparted something of real depth and earnestness to all he said, finding that he made no progress, and that she still bantered him, he beeame, perhaps naturally, irritated, and the native insolence of his character caused him to adopt a brusquerie of bearing but ill-suited to the submissive part of a real lover.

"Tell me, my wieked cousin, is my rival the baronet or Mr. Blair?"

"You have rivals in both, perhaps," replied Hesbia, with her bright hazel eyes half closed, while she elasped and unclasped Lennard's braeelet on a wrist that was white as the pearls themselves.

"Now that the absurd old boy who sold this place is gone, what will his son Lennard have in possession—a dozen of silver spoons, a baptismal mug (oh, the people of this sour Presbyterian eountry don't believe in such holiday vanities

as god-parents), well, a family Bible, the old boy's dram-bottle, of course, and his last blessing in broad Scotch."

"Travice," said Hesbia, her soft face clouding with real annoyance, "how cruel of you to talk thus, and how bad is the taste that inspires you to do so!"

"Come, Hesbia, be sensible," he resumed, bending over her again; "you can't care for this fellow. I hate your 'has beens'—your shabby-genteel people! There is no one so amusingly vain or so profound a bore as a reduced gentleman—a Scotch or Irish one particularly."

Hesbia's full, red lip curled and quivered slightly, but she made no reply, so Travice continued in his own peculiar style.

"I suppose this fellow thinks himself a trump-card here, since he has returned to his own place like the travelled monkey who has seen the world," sneered Travice.

"He has come back, poor fellow, to all that remains of what was once his place."

"Jolly jealous and envious he must be of your governor, who owns nearly the whole of it."

"You judge of his heart by your own, Travice."

"Is it proper or becoming that you should be always flirting and philandering with this fellow, as I have heard you did in Liverpool?"

"How, sir?" asked Hesbia, growing absolutely pale with anger.

"With a mere clerk in your father's counting-room," continued Travice, with irrepressible wrath, as he found himself blundering on the verge of a quarrel.

"A partner in the firm, you mean, Travice."

"Idiots, to take one of his country in at all. However humble or mean the snob may be in a firm, he always creeps up to be chief of it some day. I forget what Macaulay says in his history about this sort of thing."

"How long would you be in rising so?" taunted Hesbia.

"Besides, a partner—ha, ha! I doubt very much if his name will ever appear as such in the books, if they are aired some fine day in the Bankruptcy Court," said Travice, with one of his ugliest smiles, which Hesbia totally failed to understand. "I am but ill-inclined to render you without a struggle to such a lover, Hesbia," he continued, attempting to take her hand between his; "for I thank Fate that I know a little of life, and am not like him."

"In what way?"

"A kind of ass, who quotes Byron and Bunyan, and

spends his evening in holding wools for girls to wind and unwind."

"Byron and Bunyan—such a conjunction—Don Juan and the Pilgrim's Progress!" exclaimed Hesbia, with a genuine burst of laughter, which increased the growing rage of Cheatwood; but he, too, gave a kind of laugh, and, laying a hand upon her soft and half-averted shoulder,—

"Listen to me, dear Hesbia," said he; "I am not a bad kind of fellow in general; I would agree with the devil himself——"

"If you saw that it was your interest to do so. You must not forget, cousin, that we have known each other since childhood."

"And your experience teaches you that I shall probably come to an evil end, like the bad boy in the spelling-book."

"I hope not, Travice, for the sake of the blood we share in common, and for your father's memory."

"By Jove! I know nothing about him, except what a handsome marble slab in the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, at Liverpool, tells me—that he seems to have commenced life, like your father, as a boy at the Bluecoat School, and must have been jolly rich, to judge by the many virtues ascribed to him in gilt letters, though he left me poor enough, God knows!"

"He was a man who stood well with the world, Travice."

"The world? Curse the world! I shake my clenched hand in its hypocritical face—snap my fingers at it, and spurn alike its pity and its patronage!" exclaimed Travice, while a terribly malignant expression shone in his pale green eyes. "What is it, Hesbia, that one gets for nothing in this world?"

"Why, nothing, I suppose."

"Exactly."

"It is a detestable idea, though."

"It is truth, as my experience of it has been."

There was a moment of silence; and Hesbia, as Travice looked at her, seated in the antique chair among all the quaint lumber, in a brilliant blue silk trimmed with white lace, seemed, even to his unartistic eye, a lovely picture. In the sunlight that shone through the deeply embayed and ancient window behind, her hair, which was a rich brown in the shade, seemed then a golden red; her face was half in shadow; her dark-brown pencilled brows lent a piquancy to the soft eyes which formed her greatest fascination, but there was a provoking smile on the beautiful lips, which some might have thought too large and full. The fine

texture of her colourless skin, the symmetry of her hands and arms, all made up a charming whole, though her figure seemed moulded on a scale that promised perhaps overstoutness in the years to come. Travice thought, that after a period of matrimony, one might tolerate the change.

"Listen to me, Hesbia, for it is the last time I shall ever address you, on this subject at least," said Travice, with a tone of passion for the first time in his voice; "but you must promise not to laugh at me."

"I promise. Say on, Travice."

He drew nearer, but whatever he was about to say, a malediction came instead; for threading her way among the lumber of the closet appeared Mademoiselle Savonette, whose dark eyes were sparkling with malevolent pleasure, as she had an especial dislike for Travice Cheatwood, who was always grasping and kissing her on sly occasions, yet never gave her even a crownpiece to buy a ribbon or pair of gloves. She saw at once that she had come at a time most inopportune for him, and she now resolved to give him a further sting if possible.

"A letter for miladi. Pardonnez moi, M'sieu Sheetwood," said the black-browed Abigail with a low curtsy.

"A letter, Hesbia. Thank Heaven it is not for me," said Cheatwood, affecting to laugh. "Nothing ever finds me out but old bills, and they or their senders are inexorable. Fair cousin, you look disturbed—as the novels say. What's up?"

"It is from M'sieu Blair," continued Savonette.

Hesbia reddened with evident confusion and annoyance, but tore open the note, saying as her smiling maid withdrew,—

"What on earth does he write to me about. I don't think I have any of his books or secrets either?"

"Is your note actually from that fellow Blair?"

"Yes; how strange!" said Hesbia, with such a pretty air of wonder that one might have thought Lennard had never written to her before.

"What does he want, or mean?" asked Cheatwood, with a deepening frown on his face. "Is the fellow mad that he writes to you?"

"He simply mentions that an unfortunate circumstance will prevent him from visiting Blairavon prior to his departure. What can it be?"

"How should I know?" was the sullen response.

"You quarrelled last night, that seems evident."

"He certainly caught that legal adventurer, little Dab-

chick, cheating me at écarté ; there was a bit of a row, and that was all," replied the unabashed Travice.

"Impossible !—Mr. Dabchick cheat at cards ! The poor little creature has not the brain of a snipe ; he never could win a game from me, even when we played for bonbons or a pair of gloves. Tell me instantly all about it," she added, colouring with real vexation ; "how did it happen ?"

"Well, you know——" Travice began slowly.

"No I don't know !" she interrupted him impetuously.

"Well, you see——" he faltered.

"I don't see—I *hear*," exclaimed Miss Vere, beating the floor with her foot as she started from her chair.

"Bother ! how is a fellow ever to get on with such a spitfire as you ?"

"Any way you have had a low quarrel at cards."

"One must always have cash in hand, Hesbia. What the blind goddess omits to give us, blind hookey or écarté sometimes will."

"Travice, Travice ; I say it with sorrow, you have long since lost your reputation for honour."

"Have I ? Well, Hesbia, I have never missed it, and, for some years, have been jolly enough without it."

"Take care, sir ; you have a notoriety——"

"An attribute apt to become annoying and expensive," replied her unabashed cousin.

"But to pluck people at cards——"

"You wrong me, Hesbia. People do not win at cards always by legerdemain, but by exercising the brains that God has given them. It is simply science against folly, mind against matter. It is memory and observation."

"Knowing the backs as well as the fronts of the cards—eh ?"

"No ; but having a lightning eye, a quick hand, a memory of sequences, a memory that never fails—these enable me to win at cards ; but, enough of this ! I would speak of my passion, my love for you, Hesbia——"

"Enough of *that*, say I, and let us recur to it no more," said she emphatically, as she swept away from his presence with an expression of resolution and coldness in her great brown eyes, such as he had never seen there before, and which there could be no mistaking. The pretty smile, that from childhood she had been in the habit of according to all, whether they pleased her or not, had quite passed out of her face.

Cheatwood stood for a time with a dark expression in his pale eyes, and a cruel one on his thin lips, as he gnawed his

moustache and ran his fingers viciously through his goatee-beard.

"She has gone to answer that beast's note," he muttered; "and that answer I must and shall see, as the best means of discovering the actual terms on which they stand with each other."

And though a coward in soul, a craven at heart, Travice Cheatwood felt towards Lennard Blair all the hateful spirit of another Cain glow within him!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECRET LETTER.

AWARE that it must be by fraud or cunning, and not by force, that he could obtain a sight of any answer which his cousin might send to Lennard Blair, Travice, after observing that she was seated at her desk, and at a little buhl table in the inner drawing-room, writing—an occupation the sight of which filled him with the keenest jealous suspicions—Travice, we say, after remarking this, stole out to the avenue, there to watch the departure of any servant or other messenger towards Oakwoodlee; but without a thought as to how he was to intercept the missive, for neither the intellect or imagination of Travice were of the highest order.

He hovered near the gate-lodge, and after a delay of about twenty minutes, saw the page—the "Buttons" of the household—coming down the avenue with a note in his hand. The heart of Cheatwood beat fast with mingled pain and impatience!

Ideas of open bribery or of violence immediately occurred to him, only to be dismissed, as either would lead to ultimate detection and a final quarrel. What was to be done—to what device could he resort to secure even a sight of the note, and let it go to its destination after?

Boylike, the little messenger made several détours, dances, and gyrations from the gravelled carriage-way, round the bay-trees, cypresses, and clumps of shrubbery that grew among the smoothly mown grass of the lawn; and during one of these performances, while he was indulging himself in a species of break-down dance and singing a few lines of the last street song, Cheatwood contrived to throw a walking-stick between his legs in such a skilful manner as to trip him up, and poor Buttons fell heavily on his hands and face amid the rough gravel of the avenue.

His hat, with its lace band and cockade (it had one to

please the vanity of Hesbia), rolled off in one direction, while the wind blew the note from his hand in another.

Ere he had gathered himself up and looked about, Cheatwood's foot was planted adroitly on the billet, and the boy, with a lugubrious expression, looked around for it in vain. The page was young enough to be on the point of tears; he had scratched and torn his hands, soiled his livery, and lost the note—a triple calamity!

"Now, Mr. Cheatwood," said he, "after having your joke and knocking me over as if I was skittles or Aunt Sally, perhaps you'll help me to find my young lady's note, or I'm blow'd if there won't be a jolly row about it."

"Look alive, Buttons, and you'll be sure to see it somewhere."

"Not while you're standing on it, sir," replied the boy, whose sharp eye saw that a portion of the note was visible from under the heel of Cheatwood's boot.

"The devil! and so I am," said he, stooping, and picking it up with a glow of rage, that deepened when he saw that it was addressed to Blair, and in Hesbia's handwriting.

"Now, sir, the note, if you please," said the boy, boldly.

"It is for Mr. Blair at Oakwoodlee, I perceive."

"Yes, sir."

"Were you to wait for an answer?"

"No—just to deliver it, and come slick off; but look how precious dirty you have made it," added the boy, beginning to whine; "I can never, by no manner of means, give it to a gentleman in that state!"

"And you cannot take it back to your mistress," said Travice.

"It was all along o' you, sir!" exclaimed the boy, whose eyes were now full of tears.

"Did Miss Vere give it to you in person?"

"No, sir."

"Who, then?" asked Cheatwood, wishing to gain time for consideration.

"Mamselle Savonette; and she got it from the wally, who said it was a hinvite to dinner. I ain't noways to blame, and I'll tell Mr. Blair and Miss Hesbia so, though she guv me warning that the next mistake as I committed, after treading on Fussy's tail, I should go back by the fust train for Liverpool."

"You shall do nothing of the kind. Here, Buttons, I have got you into a scrape, and I shall get you out of it, if I can," said Cheatwood, giving the boy a crown, an unparalleled piece of liberality on his part, "Run to the gate-lodge

and get from the keeper's wife a clean envelope, a pen and ink—quick as greased lightning—and I'll wait for you here."

Brushing his hat with his cuff to smooth the nap, as he ran, Buttons—a sharp, town-bred boy—started at full speed to the gate-lodge, while Cheatwood, without a moment of hesitation, tore open the envelope, and made himself master of the contents, which ran thus :—

"I *shall be* much obliged (as I have to make a sketch at the stile *on the path to Craigellon*, which will be one of *about nine* I am preparing for my album) if you could kindly let me have some crayons, of which I am quite out. *To-morrow eveniny* will suit. I *do not* know a more pleasant occupation than drawing, and trust it will not *fail* me for many a year *to come*. Believe me, yours ever, HESBIA VERE."

In the veiled language of such correspondence the flirt was perfect. There was a flattering subtlety in the letter having no real beginning—no introductory phrase ; thus the imagination of the reader was at full liberty to supply the most endearing epithets ; and though she knew by past experience that Lennard Blair would be conscious that he was to read, as the real meaning of her letter, only the *underlined* words, she had not the slightest idea that they would be read, and equally well understood, by a third party.

The plan was, perhaps, a shallow one ; but after being puzzled for a minute, and supposing that the word "crayons" alone concealed the mystery, Travice Cheatwood, as he ran his eye a second time over Hesbia's note, took in the hidden sense of it at once, and then saw that it was a regular assignation to meet at the stile on the path to Craigellon at nine o'clock the following evening, with the tender addition, "do not fail to come."

If proofs of a secret understanding were required, he held them in his hand beyond a doubt, and something like a hoarse and bitter malediction escaped him ere he was aware that Buttons was by his side. He now saw, or thought he saw, the reason why Hesbia received his oddly and brusquely paid addresses with banter that bordered on contempt.

The "henwelloper," Buttons called it, was not quite so fine in its texture as that used by Hesbia, which Travice tore into very small pieces, and put in his pocket, being too cautious even to scatter the white shreds on the green turf. He placed the note in its new cover, addressing it in a hand as closely resembling Hesbia's as he could achieve, and gave it to the messenger.

"Now, Buttons, my sharp one," said he, "pocket your crown and keep dark about this, or it may prove a worse affair than treading on Fussy's tail!"

"All right, sir," said the liveried imp, with a finger on one side of his snub-nose and a look of intense cunning in his large protruding grey eyes. He then touched his hat and soon vanished on the path to Oakwoodlee.

From habit and his own evil training, and through the character of those among whom his lot in life had been cast, or rather among whom he had cast himself—for men are often the makers of their own destiny—it was the nature of Travice Cheatwood to assign to every human creature the worst possible motives for every action in life.

Hence he saw in this proposed meeting at the stile on the path which led to Craigellon, a lonely and sequestered place in a rural district, but a portion of a deep intrigue; and while he ground his sharp teeth at the idea, he resolved that he would frustrate the interview at every hazard.

Should he be there in person? He had no precise right to interfere; but the simple fact of his presence might mar the object of their secret meeting. Should he bring Mr. Vere to the spot, or have Hesbia shut up? She was not a girl now, and was rather too womanly and too imperious by nature and temperament to endure constraint; and if the circumstance of *his* interference was in any way discovered by Hesbia, all hope of his success for the future would be over for ever!

He had not much time for considering what he should do, so Mr. Travice Cheatwood was between the horns of a dilemma, and turned into a cool and shady copsewood, where the broad-leaved fern and rank grass grew rich and deep in all their summer fragrance, to think over the matter undisturbed and in solitude.

"I am sick of flying kites—bills, those cursed acceptances, which at one time or other are sure to fall due—so inexorably due! Something must be done—but *what?* I shall not, if I can help it, let Hesbia shunt me on one side for a smooth-tongued snob like Blair, or for that shady baronet either, though she keeps both as strings to her bow. If Hesbia won't have me, and Uncle Vere won't 'book-up' again, my look-out is rather a bad one," he muttered gloomily. "Done on the Derby, done on the Oaks; exposed by that fellow Blair—d—n him; and *that bill, too!* Old Envoyse has already got wind of it. Oh, my God, where will all this end?"

He clenched his hands, ground his teeth, and wiped his forehead, down which some clammy drops were trickling.

"Shall I for ever be a Bohemian!" he exclaimed, with something like an imprecation and a groan mingled, "shall

I for ever be doomed to trudge along the shady, and never on the sunny side of the road of life? Yet I have had my chances; every fellow has them at some time or other (so old Vere says, at least), and like a fool I have thrown them away. Perhaps so; but I may have one throw of the dice left yet—in Hesbia."

He remembered what he had heard Mr. Vere say, when suddenly he had come upon him and Sir Cullender, of his desire to possess Blair's little place, called Oakwoodlee, and his intention of then settling, by a trust deed during his life, and while solvent, the entire estate of Blairavon on Hesbia; and a black storm of fury seemed to gather in the heart of Travice, as he thought of all he might lose by Lennard's successful rivalry.

He was still lingering in the woods when the bell rang for dinner, and he found that evening had already drawn on, and that he had to hasten home to complete a hurried toilette.

All that evening during dinner and after it, while lingering in the drawing-room, Cheatwood was undisguisedly silent and spiritless. Flora Cheyne, who was a lively and ladylike girl, did her best to rouse him, but strove in vain; for he was too sulky—too ill-bred in fact—to act a part he did not feel, while Hesbia, who was studying him closely, almost flattered herself that it was love for her and disappointment consequent to the sharp and final rejection of that morning.

That it was disappointment there could be little doubt; but, added thereto, were jealousy, avarice, and hate; the dread of a shameful detection, and the maturing of a desperate purpose.

He pleaded that he felt indisposed—had smoked too much, he feared—or perhaps it was the walnuts at dinner and so forth, when Mr. Vere remarked his strange appearance; and times there were when his aspect was so wretched that Hesbia, who was naturally kind and good-natured, tried to flatter, soothe, and cheer him; but this change of bearing on her part served only to exasperate, as it failed to inspire him with the hope that through her means his embarrassments might pass away.

Without real love for her, his blasé heart was full of jealousy; dread of the coming toils—toils that must inevitably close around him—with avarice and intense selfishness, filled up the measure of his misery. He imbibed much wine that night, more than ever Hesbia had seen him take since he came to Blairavon, and all the following day he required

from the butler such a plentiful supply of brandy and soda, that the sleek and portly custodian of the wine-binns was quite perplexed; and ever and anon Travice would mutter, while the glass rattled against his teeth, for his hands shook nervously,—

"Whatever I have to do to-night, the more I drink, the more fit I shall be to do it!"

As this fatal evening drew on, he never lost sight of Hesbia. In his desperate soul his ideas were as yet vague, and the quantity he had imbibed over-night, and during the past day, had certainly not served to lessen that peculiar emotion of expansion which all wrongs or slights assume when viewed through the medium of alcohol.

The sun was in the west, and the evening was as beautiful and balmy as any lovers could desire it to be, when Hesbia, who had some intuitive dread of Travice, conceived a plan for getting him out of the way, and sending him in a direction exactly opposite to that of her trysting place.

On the lawn before the house, he was lingering after dinner, amid the greenery of the grass, and the rustling of the trees, whose wavy shadows fell eastward far athwart it now; but to him the green cloth of the billiard-table was worth all the verdure of nature. His eyes were bloodshot; his cheeks rather paler than usual, and his fair moustache hid the dark and unhealthy hue of his lips. He was still in his dinner dress, and absently held a cigarette between the fingers of a daintily-gloved hand, and put it in his mouth from time to time, totally unconscious that it was quite unlit, or had long since gone out.

"Will you do me a great favour, Travice, dear?" asked Hesbia, who suddenly appeared before him with a roll of music in her hands, and one of her wonderful and winning smiles in her clear hazel eyes.

"I'll do anything in the world for you, Hesbia," said he, in a voice that was husky.

"Last night Flora Cheyne forgot Tannhauser, and some other music, which I know she requires. Will you have the kindness to walk down to the Haughs with them for me—for her, I should say? It is only a mile beyond the mains of Kaims; the road is beautifully wooded."

"Ah—indeed."

"And you are such a favourite with dear Flora!"

"Pleasant—very."

Hesbia paused, for though she had got up her brightest and most pleading expression for the occasion, it was practised in vain; for Travice, not being naturally a lover, looked

on the bright face, the seductive eyes, and wavy hair, with coldness, hardness, and distrust, while he thought,—

"How sweetly she can smile on 'dear Travice,' when she has a secret object to serve, some little game in view."

"The evening is beautiful," said he; "will you accompany me?"

"Impossible!" said Hesbia, colouring.

"Why?" he asked, with knitted brows.

"I have to write letters—to see the housekeeper, the cook, and attend to ever so many things; but if you decline to do me this little service, Travice, I can send a servant, or one of the under-gardeners," she replied.

"I do not decline; but I must make some change in my dress."

"Thanks, Travice, dear. I knew that I had but to ask, and you would be sure to oblige me," she replied, and, patting his hand, placed the roll of music in it, and, gathering her flowing skirt with singular grace, tripped through one of the low windows of the drawing-room, and disappeared, after giving him a brilliant smile, and a kiss blown from the tips of her fingers; while with a strange grimace on his features, and an ugly word on his tongue, Travice, who shrewdly suspected *why* he was sent in a direction exactly opposite to Craigellon, ascended to his room to make some change in his dress.

His mind was a chaos of bitterness and wrath.

The heat of the summer evening seemed stifling. Who the deuce, he thought, could have expected such an atmosphere in the North? His throat was parched; he cast off coat, vest, and necktie. He had already drained his water-carafe. He tried a havannah, a cigarette, and a pipe in turn; but all were failures to soothe.

Was he going mad, or should he get vulgarly drunk in earnest? His hand was on the bell-rope, and then he withdrew it, for he was nervously infirm of purpose.

No; reason, reflection, fear, prevented him from imbibing more than he had already done at dinner, lest he should commit some extravagance, and betray himself; for whatever outrage or trick he might be tempted to perpetrate for the purpose of preventing the interview at the stile, and its too probable revelations from taking place, the instinct of self-preservation remained intact and strong in the mind of Mr. Travice Cheatwood.

"Well, well, in a month or so, the game will be up with me at last—played out," he muttered, "and *this* affair more or less won't be much in the sum total of delinquency. Anyway, I may have to deprive this country of the benefit of my society, and go to America, the devil, or anywhere."

And he remembered that he had only about five sovereigns to carry him to any of the places so vaguely indicated.

He looked hastily round the room, which was too luxuriously furnished to be relinquished without regret. Shining above the tops of the old trees, the evening sun was streaming cheerily in, and a red spark seemed to fill the eyes of Travice, as they fell upon a weapon in a corner—his air-gun—the same by means of which he had shot the terrier, Don, the real or pretended caressing of which had led to the card-dropping discovery.

In an evil moment had Travice Cheatwood won that illegal weapon from a poaching companion at cards. Often had he been inclined to sell or throw it away, lest he might be tempted, as he was now, in a dark hour, to use it with a fatal effect; so often is it the case, that the power of doing mischief will cause mischief to be done.

He had already thought of its effect—silent, noiseless, deadly, and sure; and had striven to turn a deaf ear to the bad promptings of his evil angel; but now his eyes lit up with a strange malevolence as he looked at it.

He was certain that none in Blairavon knew that he possessed such a weapon; for, to the casual eye, it appeared to be only a large and heavy walking-staff.

"If it is to be done at all, why not be done now—now, when I am in the mood for it? But I must not kill him if I can help it; though hating him with the hatred of a devil," he muttered; "I must only seek to maim—only seek to maim—it may be to disfigure him for life, and then he'll fail to please the dainty eye of the flirting Hesbia Vere!"

He took up the pneumatic weapon, removed what seemed to be merely the knob of the stick, examined its barrels, lock, and trigger, and as he did so a grim, but desperate calm, seemed to come over him. Then to his eye the light appeared to darken, and the atmosphere to become more stifling: he rose to throw open the window, and felt the floor as if unsteady under his feet when he walked. It seemed to heave up and down, and to meet his steps halfway. Strange things, he thought, were passing round his head and whispering in his ears.

"Bah!" said he, suddenly rallying, as he dropped a few bullets in the pocket of a shooting-jacket he had donned; "I must not allow the cursed superstition called 'conscience' to mar my fortune in any way. One good shot to-night, and then this gun must leave my hand for ever!"

And he who yesterday only shrunk nervously from the exposure of a card-sharping row, was now—"so quickly do

men's steps acquire an impetus on the downward path"—stealing forth without necktie or vest, armed, and almost heedless whether or not he committed an assassination.

He still carried, however, the roll of music, which he meant to deliver at the lodge of the Haughs, in time, he hoped, to prevent the meeting at the stile on the path to Craigellon.

CHAPTER XXII.

WILL THEY MEET?

THE sun was just dipping beyond the western hills, an undulating line of dark purple against the amber sky, and then Hesbia knew that it would be nearly a half-hour's walk in the twilight, ere she reached the place where she promised to grant the interview to Lennard Blair. The last red rays were lingering on the tops of the trees, on the gilt vanes and carved gablets of the old manor-house—little pediments which bore the stag's head caboshed and the cognizance of many an alliance of the old line of Blairavon.

She did not issue forth by the avenue, as she knew that the baronet and her father generally had a quiet cigar there together about that time; but she went through the garden, where the deep old box-edging bordered the long ribbon-like stripes of verbenas, calceolarias, and geraniums, which now wore all their gayest hues; past the old and quaintly-carved sun-and-moon dial, which bore the arms of the Blairs, with the date 1590; past the vineries and great conservatory, till she reached and opened a little private gate that led to the spacious lawn (which has not been ploughed, but ever under grass, since the Union of the Crowns, according to the *Gazetteer* of Scotland), and walked with hasty pace to reach the roadway, that led almost directly to the narrow, diverging side-path which ascended the knoll, or round and isolated rock known as Craigellon.

The weather was warm—even sultry. Hesbia had on a piqué, striped with green; a black lace shawl floated over her shoulders, a most knowing and piquante little hat, with a gleaming bird of Paradise-plume added to the natural charm of her soft, bright face.

Hesbia was intensely curious to learn *what* Lennard wished to say to her so particularly and so secretly, too!

Did it concern Travice, of whom she had so many suspicions; or did he mean at last to make a formal proposal to

her? The beating of her heart increased as she surmised thus to herself.

Until she finds that she is about to lose a lover, a coquette like Hesbia Vere never knows how much she might have learned to like him; and now that Lennard Blair was about to be sent to South America for an indefinite period—there seemed something unpleasantly vague in the locality and term of his absence—he acquired a new and enhanced interest in her eyes. She had questioned her sleek and somewhat taciturn papa about it, and he fully confirmed the information conveyed in Lennard's note; and so quite a gush of sympathy for the poor fellow welled up in her heart—for she was thoroughly a sensationist by nature; and that she might look well in this—perhaps their parting interview—she hung in her pretty white ears a pair of beautiful gold and pearl pendants, which Sir Cullender had presented to her with great formality at breakfast that morning.

Whatever Lennard had to say to her must be of interest—must be odd—strange, she thought, and would be certain to take a very lover-like tone; of that she had no doubt, and the conviction and anticipation gave a lustre to her eye, a colour to her cheek, and a springiness to her step.

"He looks so well when making love, with his dark and earnest eyes," she murmured, for all Lennard's love and adoration had been implied hitherto, and not declared; for the doubts and difficulties, the dread and timidity that withheld a declaration and fettered his tongue were known to himself alone. Hesbia looked at her watch.

"Ten minutes from nine!"

She could not stay long at the stile; but then, as Lennard would of course be waiting there, he would accompany her homeward along the road, and through the lawn to the garden gate, to prevent the possible locking of which, and to secure her retreat, she had, with much forethought, put the key in her pocket.

The black, flinty brow of Craigellon, fringed with the yellow bells of the beautiful broom, rose against the clear and opal-tinted sky. She could see the path that wound over the grassy upland slope towards it, between two tall cedars; she could also see the old, well-worn and mossy stile, but Lennard Blair was nowhere in sight.

This was scarcely courteous.

If he came as a lover he should certainly have been there before her; so Hesbia paused, looked around, and then proceeded at a much slower pace than she had hitherto adopted. To be first at the trysting-place would never do.

She listened; all was still, but the cawing of the rooks as they winged their way homeward to the old coppice or the ruined church of St. John of Jerusalem. Not a footfall broke the silence. The calmness of evening—the soft, balmy gloaming—lay over everything. The trees were assuming a bronze tint; the wavy line of the Pentland Hills was deepening from russet green to purple and indigo blue, and their glens were darker still.

Save in the west, where the crimson flush of the set sun lingered beyond Clackmannan, the sky was all of an opal tint that blended with azure as the twinkling stars came out, and the air was full of fragrance; for near the stile, which Hesbia now had reached, there was a grove of balsam pines and silver firs, which were old and decaying, and the breeze, as it passed through them, seemed to be laden with the perfume of the strawberry and pineapple.

All unused to the most petty disappointment or delay, Hesbia felt extremely annoyed on seeing no sign of Lennard's approach; and now her tiny gold watch indicated that the time was three minutes past nine—decidedly past!

The place was lonely, and the great cedars by the stile cast a gloom over all the place. They were trees of vast age, and were said to have been raised from the seeds of those that grew at Lebanon, brought from the distant East long, long ago, by some pious and valiant Brother of St. John of Torphichen—tradition avers by Sir William Knollys, Lord of St. John, who fell by King James's side at Flodden; for the whole district, like every other in broad Scotland, teems with old, old memories, that even the railroad fails to obliterate.

The flames from the works at the coal-pits on the mains of Kaims now flared out upon the deepening sky at times, and Hesbia felt that she could not, with propriety, loiter where she was much longer.

What was she to say if he proposed?

One may have thoughts, but how seldom has one the right words to say at the proper time! Should she accept him? Poor Lennard! at that very moment, over their "quiet weed," in the great stately avenue yonder, perhaps her papa and the unhealthy-looking baronet were casting her horoscope—her future—after a very different fashion of their own.

Always attracted most by externals, the finished cut of Lennard's coat, whatever its fashion, his choice of vests, his perfect gloves, and a certain courtliness of manner which he inherited from his father, a modulation of voice and soft expression of eye when addressing ladies in general, and

herself in particular, had always led Hesbia to admire and like him.

At that moment there came through the air a strange, weird cry—almost a shriek, that made her shudder. Unlike any sound she had ever heard before, it seemed as the voice of one in mortal anguish and agony. Shrilly it came towards her on the breeze of the darkening evening! She listened intently, but as no other sound followed she returned to her own thoughts.

"What can detain him after all our fuss, secrecy, and assignation?" she exclaimed, with impatience that bordered on anger, as she tapped the steps of the stile with her parasol. "He must have misunderstood all about my letter and will no doubt be sending me some crayons to-morrow! Would that I had been plainer, less mysterious; but it is not like Lennard to be so provokingly stupid!"

His absence, unless he had been suddenly seized by illness, seemed to Hesbia totally unaccountable. What could have happened?

An accident! He did not ride, and she knew that he was without horses. That distant and wailing cry had made her heart stand still!

A dread came over her now. Intent upon her own thoughts she had not perceived how much the shadows had deepened, and how gloomy the great cedars made the pathway by the stile.

Somehow she felt inclined to take note, with strange and intense acuteness, of all the features of the now sombre landscape; the number of steps in the stile—there were four, worn, hollow, and spotted with yellow lichens; the forms of the stones in the rough field dyke; the hedgerows, the chirping of the last swallow as it went to its nest; a hawk winging its flight sharply across the clear, calm sky, over which the darkness was stealing like an impalpable tide.

A quarter to ten by the tiny watch; ten minutes—five minutes to ten, and still no appearance of Lennard Blair! To remain longer was unseemly—absurd; and, in perplexity and alarm she arose and hurried home, while the dew was falling heavily.

Unseen she crossed the lawn, reached the garden, entered the house, and went straight to her own room, when Mademoiselle Savonette, who alone had been cognizant of her absence, informed her that "M'sieur Sheetwood had come home about an hour since—quite unwell—*malade—indisposé*, and had retired to his bed."

Hesbia paid little attention to this information at the time; but there came an occasion when she recalled it unpleasantly to memory. She felt some alarm—for the cry she had heard haunted her; but she felt a great deal more surprise than anger.

Mademoiselle Savonette saw that her mistress was seriously ruffled; but, suspecting a meeting with "M'sieur Blair" as the cause thereof, she was too discreet a Frenchwoman to make any unnecessary remarks, while dressing Hesbia's masses of chestnut-coloured hair for the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

To the beauty of the evening, and the soft charms of the surrounding landscape, rendered so lovely by the mingling of wood and stream, of farm and meadow, with the bolder mountain scenery over all, Travice Cheatwood was totally insensible, as he walked onward with feverish impatience and uncertain step.

The tower of the village church—a structure old as the days when its founder, David, the Scottish Justinian, sat at the gate of his castle of Edinburgh, to administer justice and relieve the wants of the poor—stood up in dark and solid outline against the radiating glory of the setting sun, of which it seemed for a time the focus.

Cheatwood apologised to his conscience, or sought to stifle his selfish fear for the result of the crime he intended to commit, by a steady review of his own desperate fortune; by nursing or fanning his wrath against Lennard for the card-exposure, till it assumed the proportions of a deadly and wanton wrong; by a knowledge of the imperative necessity that no meeting or revelation should take place, as he knew the dangerous pride of Hesbia, the frail tenure of her friendship for him, and her decided preference for Lennard Blair: yet he flattered himself that he only meant to maim—not kill—his rival, though in reality not caring much, whatever the result, provided he was neither discovered nor suspected; and he believed that no one was aware of his possessing a weapon so dangerous and illegal as that with which he was armed; though, by some means, during a visit to his rooms at Blairavon, Mr. Dabchick had become cognizant of the circumstance.

Travice was not without fears that, by having to proceed in an entirely opposite direction, in obedience to Hesbia's

wily message, he might miss Lennard, and that the interview, every way so fatal to his interest and credit, might, after all, take place.

He had thus, first to get rid of the music entrusted to his charge, that he might, if necessary, have the means of proving that, at the time the event occurred, he was in a direction quite away from Craigellon—where, doubtless, the lovers would linger long enough, and where he was resolved, if he could steal upon them unperceived, that he would shoot down Blair, even if he stood by Hesbia's side; and as he hurried on towards the Haughs, Travice longed for the meeting, and felt a wild, a desperate, and clamorous anxiety to get through the last and worst of what he knew to be a dark, a disreputable—and, that which was worse than all, personally—a dangerous affair!

He looked at his watch as he walked along the cool and shady road, which was bordered by high hedgerows and old trees, the intertwined foliage of which rustled pleasantly in the passing breeze. The sun had set beyond the mountains; the old tower of the village church seemed darker than ever, and sharper in outline. Twilight was stealing on, and in half an hour the meeting would take place at the stile.

At the gate-lodge of the Haughs he delivered the roll of music, with one of his cards, for Miss Cheyne, muttering to the keeper something about "the sultry state of the weather," probably as an explanation of his flushed and somewhat disordered appearance; and then hastened to reach a lane which led, he knew, through the fields towards the place of meeting, grasping with feverish impatience his weapon as he went.

To those who know not what it is, we may explain that an air-gun has two barrels, one *inside* the other, the inner being of necessity of a smaller bore; down these the balls are put by means of a ramrod like that of any muzzle-loader, and from thence they are expelled. A syringe is fixed in the stock of the gun, by which the air is injected into the cavity between the external and central barrels. Another valve, on being opened by the trigger, permits the condensed air to expel the bullet, which comes forth without sound, but with deadly force. If this valve be opened and shut suddenly, one charge of condensed air will suffice for the discharge of several balls; but if the whole is emitted at once, the force of expulsion is great indeed.

"I've seen many a sensation drama (Travice never read novels, as he hated them), but by Jove! I never thought to figure in one," he muttered through his clenched teeth, as he wiped the clammy perspiration from his face and ears.

Ere reaching the lane which diverges at a right angle from the highway and leads westward to Craigellon—being, in fact, but a continuation of the same path which Hesbia was traversing from the eastward to reach the stile, a central point—Travice heard footsteps, and his heart leaped painfully for a moment, and then for another seemed to stand still, when the figure of Lennard Blair, there—*there* where he least expected to meet him, crossed the road and entered the footway before him.

The truth was that Lennard had been sharing a farewell dinner with Doctor Feverley, at the latter's little cottage in the hamlet, and was now hastening, with a light and hopeful heart, to keep his tryst with Hesbia—a last and to him it might prove a most important one.

Travice sprang forward; not a second was to be lost—his game, his victim, his rival was before him, in sight, in range; but Travice was rendered for a brief time powerless by a sudden and painful but spasmodic contraction of the heart, by a singing in his ears, and a species of blindness that came upon him.

The grass was growing rank and deep in the old and unfrequented path, so the footsteps of the victim and the destroyer were alike muffled, as the latter glided after the former, whose figure loomed darkly against the twilight of the west; then Travice levelled his weapon, and aiming low—intent to wound, but not to kill—pulled the trigger!

There was a sound like a hiss as the ball was shot; then Lennard uttered the wild cry that was heard by Hesbia—one of agony, as if struck in a vital part: he threw up his arms, and fell heavily on his back.

Travice saw this, but he saw no more. He forced a passage through a dense and thorny hedge, tearing his hands and clothes in the process, and, dashing into a coppice, rushed away by what he conceived to be the nearest route to Blairavon.

Through the deep rank fern, the lair of the deer and the hare; over water-courses and rivulets; over sunk fences, stone walls, and turf dykes; across fields of sprouting corn and wheat, he ran, with a speed he never thought to exert, stumbling, falling, rising, and plunging, as if pursued by something unseen, and with a mortal terror in his heart—a terror that came upon him the moment he pulled the fatal trigger.

Bathed in perspiration, weak as a child, feeble and trembling in every limb and fibre, he was compelled at times to pause, to lie on the cool earth, and recover breath and the

power of further volition. Then, through the singing in his ears and the memory of Lennard's cry, there seemed an awful, a preternatural, a dead stillness in the air of the summer evening. His heart beat madly, painfully; there was still the old clamorous anxiety about it; but added thereto was a gnawing terror of the future, of suspicion and discovery. The very trees that cast their gloom upon his path seemed as if they were mute witnesses against him; the stars in the sky, as they came twinkling out one by one, were as eyes observant of the new and terrible crime he had committed—for might not Blair be dead?

He would have given worlds—years of his life—to know that Lennard was only wounded, not dead—not dead; but he dared not go back to look; he must away—away to conceal himself, and escape, if he could, the alarm and, perhaps, detection of the morrow.

Away—but to where?

Cunning rather than wisdom suggested that to pass unseen into Blairavon House, to get to bed and feign an illness, were his best plans; and he staggered wearily on to put them into execution.

The extra bullets with which he had provided himself, he threw far into a cornfield; there, if ever found, they would lie at least unseen till harvest-time. He feared to cast away the air-gun, lest it should give a clue to the committal of the crime; and he knew not where to conceal it.

In the root of a tree—none were hollow; in a rabbit-hole—none was near; to bury it might only lead to its certain discovery by the disturbance of the earth; in the bed of the trouting-stream it might be found by the first fisherman who came whipping the water with his line; in a ditch it might be discovered by the first truant-boy who came bird-nesting or some ploughman going afield: of all such instances he had heard or read in trials and at inquests held by coroners. There were no such officials in Scotland; but he knew that in each county was a Procurator Fiscal, the terror of whose name—there was something foreign in the sound of it—he now felt fully for the first time; and with this came visions of arrest, of shame and imprisonment, of trial and suffering—even of Calcraft, that finisher of the law, so cold and stern, white-haired and inexorable!

Thus instead of casting away the weapon he took it home with him, though he had sundry vague ideas of leaving it in some one's house or room, that on *them* might fall the suspicion and the punishment; his remorse for the murder, if such it was, being quite secondary to his terror of personal implication in the deed.

Why, oh why had he not yielded to the occasional better impulses which had prompted him to cast away this deadly but silent weapon, the tempter to a crime like this?

He had read or heard of men—yea, and of women, too—who, after such an act, felt as if the crime, the sense of being a destroyer, added to their own secret importance; who felt actually elevated in the conviction that they had sent an immortal soul from earth on its long, long journey.

Amid all the wild incoherence of his thoughts—the sense as if his mind wandered among cliffs and pitfalls, precipices and caverns; places of dread, and doubt, and danger—no such emotion as this occurred to him.

It was all misery and fear—intense and selfish fear!

As he staggered through the vestibule and up the staircase of Blairavon House, leaning on what appeared to be a thick walking-staff, but which was actually the means of the crime he had just perpetrated, his pale and wretched appearance excited the surprise of Mademoiselle Savonette, to whom he muttered something of being ill, and to send the butler to him as he required some brandy-and-water, and then he reached once more his own room.

An age seemed to have elapsed since he had left it!

"Candles?" no; he did not require them—his head was throbbing and his eyes could not bear the light; but the brandy-and-water he drank with the thirst of one who might have been in the Black Hole at Calcutta. How his teeth chattered against the rummer, and how grateful was the ice which the thoughtful butler had dropped into it!

Then, by chance, his eyes fell upon a mirror. He started back on beholding the ghastly pallor of his own face, which seemed white as that of a spectre in the twilight.

It was no longer like his own; it had a dark scowl upon it, and he drew fearfully and doubtfully closer, to assure himself that it was really a reflection and not the spectrum of *another*. His chest was heaving, and the bead-drops of a cold perspiration were on his temples. He concealed the air-gun between the mattresses of his bed for a time, and after placing his tremulous hands upon his brow, as if he would compress his brain and recall his scattered energies, he muttered,—

"To bed—to bed! I must not be seen thus!"

Then, hastily undressing, he tied up for future concealment or destruction the suit he had worn that evening, sprang into bed and buried his face among the pillows; but a new terror seized him—that he might become really ill; and, if a fever, conduced by his past potations and present

terrible emotions, came upon him, he might, in his delirium, reveal, and so bear witness against himself.

"Let me be calm—be calm, or I shall go mad!" he muttered again and again, while striving to reason quietly on the chances for and against the death of his victim and the hazards of discovery. Strange to say, the latter seemed to grow less; and, after reviewing all the features of his position, the prospect appeared more re-assuring—or was it an insane and defiant recklessness that possessed him?

Amid it all, in his ears and in his soul was the echo of a terrible cry, and he seemed to see a human figure lying on its back, in that dark and lonely path, with pallid face, with fallen jaw, and stony eyes that stared at the silent stars!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SILENT SHOT.

THIS had been the last entire day that Lennard Blair expected to spend at Oakwoodlee, and he had many arrangements to make with Stephen Hislop concerning the future letting of the house, and with Elsie on other matters, during the tearful pauses in which the poor old woman indulged while packing his portmanteau.

He had to dine with Feverley and then to meet Hesbia; and, that other matters might not be wanting to occupy his thoughts, Maxwell, Mr. Vere's valet, brought him a brief note from that gentleman, and it ran thus:—

"I hope nothing will prevent you starting duly for Liverpool to-morrow. I see by Bradshaw that the first train is the 7.30 a.m. from Carstairs. A forgery to the extent of £1,400 has been committed in my name—so Envoyse writes me. See him at once about it, and he will give you all the particulars—at least, so far as he knows them."

"A forgery!" repeated Lennard, pondering; "I shall not go without seeing Hesbia, at all events, and learning my fate from her own lips."

Having no intention of keeping the reader behind the curtain, we shall simply mention that a cheque for £400 with which, on a very remote chance of repayment, Mr. Vere had favoured Travice Cheatwood, had passed into the hands of others for £1,400—a little additional penmanship having made a difference in the document, of which the bank entirely disapproved.

Matters had not been going on very satisfactorily with the house of Vere and Co. lately; so old Mr. Envoyse had

acquainted Lennard. Several ships had been lost, and the insurances effected thereon were about to be toughly disputed in a court of law; two were openly alleged to have been scuttled on the high seas. Other untoward events had occurred; and Mr. Vere seemed to be by no means easy in his mind, to judge by the tenor of his communications.

"Once again in the old alley off Canning Place, I'll have a general overhaul of these matters," thought Lennard. "Perhaps the old head clerk is unnecessarily anxious; but he has thrice hinted mysteriously of 'untoward events,' and I don't much fancy the phrase."

And a time was to come when Lennard would dislike it still more. At present he was full only of the pleasure and anticipation with which Hesbia's coquettish letter had inspired him. He dressed carefully for his rendezvous; yet his toilette was artistic in its apparent carelessness. His browned but handsome hands were gloveless, as he was in the country, and he now wore the only piece of jewellery in which he indulged—his father's large old-fashioned signet ring; he wore a black velvet shooting-coat, with a lilac vest (a colour which he knew Hesbia admired), a spun-silk shirt, and white wide-awake, the contour of which set off his fine face, with its straight features, dark complexion, darker eyes, and smart curve of moustache.

The sorrow and affectionate solicitude of his two old domestics, as they hovered about him during the entire day, had proved somewhat of a "worry" to Lennard; but the earnestness of their kindly wishes and suggestions filled his heart with gratitude and a regret that he could not effect something permanent for their comfort. He arranged, however, that they were to remain at Oakwoodlee till the place was let or otherwise disposed of. Not that Lennard ever meant to part with this last fragment of his patrimony; he remembered too well his dying father's wishes and the old traditional virtue ascribed to the retention of the Charter Stone; but all that he proposed to do for Elsie and Stephen he did in kindness of heart and a sense of gratitude to the two faithful old creatures, in a land where such faith and love as theirs are daily growing less. His father would have done so too, though it would have been with something of the stately old feudal, or, better still, the old Scottish patriarchal idea, of ministering to two humble but hereditary claimants on his bounty and protection; but Lennard viewed their future and his own chances of ability through the medium of experience, and as a practical young man of business.

"You will look after my two old friends when I am gone, Feverley," said he.

"I shall, my dear fellow—with a heart and a half!" replied the Doctor, in his earnest and impulsive way.

Amid all the kindness and hospitality displayed by Feverley and the kind old lady, his mother, Lennard was watching the shadows as they deepened on the slopes of the hills, and longing for evening. The dinner at the Doctor's little cottage was excellent; for Mrs. Feverley, in honour of her son's friend, had made unusual exertions: the hotchpotch was voted a great success, the lamb had been fed on the Pentland slopes, the green peas and cauliflower were of the Doctor's own culture, and the salmon was fine though curdy, so Lennard and Feverley fed like two heroes of the Waverley novels.

At last the moment came when Blair must bid the Doctor adieu, if he would be at the stile in time, as he had to pass through the hamlet of Blairavon, and traverse the road by the Haughs, a greater distance than he had first reckoned on; and, full of what he would say, in what terms he would describe his nervous dread of being deemed a fortune-hunter, how he should explain his prospects and his hopes for the future; his too probable despair if he was compelled to sail for Vera Cruz without a pledge—a solemn promise from her; how he would seek even to soften the faults of Travice Cheatwood,—all passed through his mind as he proceeded along the old shady roads, where the stately trees—the beech, the lime, and chesnut—entwined their rustling foliage overhead. He hastened on.

Already the farewell rays of the setting sun were resting redly on the whinstone face of Craigellon, at the base of which the black coots were floating in the loch where his uncle Lennard had been found; and erelong the stars would be twinkling from the sea of azure, amber, and opal overhead. The sunlight faded out, the blue deepened, and the shadows in the woods grew darker.

"Oh, which of all these stars shines over the fortunate?" thought Lennard, as he gazed at Hesper twinkling over the summit of Craigellon; "what is the secret that governs, aids, or inspires the great element of human success, or that enables men to fight the great battle of life with a clear brain, a brave heart, and a strong hand?"

Would the golden dream of love, of wealth, and success ever be realised by him? He increased his pace, for he had now turned into the grassy footway that led directly to the stile, which was only about half a mile distant; but he had

not proceeded far when a sudden ery of anguish escaped him—the same cry heard by Hesbia at their trysting-place—while his right leg seemed to break under him, and he fell on his back in a bewilderment of terror and exquisite pain. Save a crashing of branches, as Travice Cheatwood, clutching his treacherous weapon, tore unseen through an adjacent hedge, there was no sound in the woods or in the air near him.

Panting rather than bleeding, Lennard endeavoured to struggle to his feet, only to sink again more helplessly and in greater agony. His first idea was, that his leg had mysteriously snapped—given way—under him ; and just before being thus stricken down, he had been conscious of one of those unaccountable shivers, called in Scotland a *grue*, which, according to superstition, comes only when a human foot treads on the ground where one's grave is to be made.

"Oh God!" he exclaimed, while the bead-drops were wrung from his temples by pain and perplexity, "what misery—what strange calamity is this that has come upon me—at such a time too—and Hesbia—Hesbia! ——"

Rallying his energies, he examined the now useless limb, and found the blood flowly freely from a wound inflicted some inches above the knee-joint, over which he had no power, for the bullet had fairly smashed through the thigh-bone. He felt convinced that it was the effect of a shot ; but fired from whence, by whom, and from what species of projectile—a rifle, musket, or pistol?—for he had been unconscious of hearing a sound ; and full as his mind was with the image of Hesbia Vere, he could not have failed to detect the report. He was bleeding fast ; again and again he called for help—for succour ; but, as the place was lonely, he heard only the voices of the wood-pigeons, as he scared them from their nests, and he feared he might lie long enough in that unfrequented path, ere a passer that way discovered him. Did not a year elapse before the remains, said to be those of his uncle Lennard, were discovered by a dog among the sedges by the adjacent loch?

The terror of bleeding, perhaps to death, alone and in the night, came vividly upon him ; to stop the hæmorrhage, he tightly bound his handkerchief round the wound, and again shouted with all his strength. This time he was successful in attracting the attention of a passing horseman, who drew his bridle and paused on the highway.

The Reverend Doctor Kirkford, who had been dining with Ranald Cheyne, at the Haughs, and was jogging along the highway on his barrel-bellied Galloway cob, heard Lennard's

cry, and, coming to the spot, was grievously shocked and horrified to find the son of his old friend stretched on the pathway, pale, exhausted, bloody, nearly speechless, and what was still more bewildering, totally unable to explain or assign a cause for his being reduced to such a condition. The old minister was a sturdy and humane man ; he lost not an instant in procuring assistance ; and about the same time when Hesbia Vere, with a pouting lip and angry eye, was having her long chestnut tresses manipulated and arranged for the night by Mademoiselle Savonette, Lennard was being placed in bed, helpless and faint with agony and loss of blood, in the old house at Oakwoodlee, while the worthy minister—leaving Elsie and Stephen Hislop to moan, and marvel, and wring their hands—was lashing up his old cob, and galloping like a madman, to fetch Doctor Feverley.

CHAPTER XXV

AT BREAKFAST.

"If you write of this coarse work-a-day world," remarks an author recently, "you can no more ignore certain repulsive phases of society than you can write a history of London without mention of its courts and purlieus."

Mr. Travice Cheatwood is certainly one of those repulsive characters ; but his introduction to the reader is as necessary to the course of our narrative as that of Lennard Blair himself. The deep and dreamless sleep which is so soothing and reviving, and which generally follows a severe exertion of the mind or body, came not to him. Sleep he did ; but his slumber was a mere succession of frightful nightmares and fitful startings. Pity for Lennard's death—if he was dead, or for his sufferings if alive—he had none in the slightest degree. His sole, or dominant emotion, was a selfish aching, and craven fear for himself ; and that by the recent act he had put a climax to a long career of secret crime, which was now on the verge of inevitable discovery. From having been hitherto parti-coloured, his prospects now were involved in utter gloom.

In the morning, the valet who answered his bell was almost scared by the wan, sharp face, that spoke of an inward struggle of no ordinary magnitude, and by the haggard expression of his pale-green bloodshot eyes. The sound of the brebkfast-gong made him leap in bed with a convulsive start, thus showing how thoroughly his nerves were unstrung and his whole system shaken.

"Maxwell," said Mr. Vere, to the aiguiletted servant who carved and brought him cold beef and game-pie from the sideboard; "where is Mr. Cheatwood this morning?"

"Studying in the billiard-room," suggested Sir Cullender.

"Ill in bed, sir," replied Maxwell.

"I don't wonder at it—the cigar is never out of his mouth," said the hawk-eyed baronet, decapitating his third egg.

"Yes, papa—I have heard that Travice is very ill," said Hesbia, who was presiding over the tea and coffee department with a splendid service of Wedgwood-ware before her—the pots and urn of silver, and so chased and massive that they might have graced a palace, while all the breakfast-table glittered with crystal, plate, and ivory, in the flood of morning light that streamed through the painted oriel behind her chair; but now the matter of Cheatwood's illness was eclipsed in interest, when the butler, with his usual calmness of visage, and imperturbable company-bearing somewhat changed, came forward rather nervously and hurriedly, to announce that "one of the under gamekeepers was just arrove in the servants 'all with the hawful news as how young Mr. Lennard Blair had been shot dead——."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mr. Vere.

"A'most, or very nigh it."

"When—where?"

"Last night, sir, in the fields."

The low, sharp cry that escaped Hesbia, as she let her cup drop from her trembling hand, drew the black, shining eyes of the unmoved baronet somewhat inquiringly on her.

"Shot—shot, do you say?" resumed Mr. Vere, in great excitement.

"Sorely wounded, sir, at all events," replied the butler, who was a large, bald-headed, and remarkably sleek-looking personage, attired in black, with an ample white vest.

"But shot—shot by whom?" demanded Hesbia, who had grown deadly pale.

"Hirish navvies, or some of the pitmen; who else hereabouts would have done so, for the people a'most hadore the young gentleman: but I wish, Miss Vere, as we were all safe out o' this, and 'ome in Liverpool—I do."

Hesbia now remembered the strange cry that had reached her as she sat by the stile; and there she had loitered and lingered in growing anger, while he was lying bleeding, helplessly, it might be, dying in the open fields!

"He was found quite faint with loss of blood by the clergyman of the parish, Doctor Kirkford, who took him 'ome, and sent for the Doctor at the village; but he can't subtract the bullets, nohow."

"Bullets—how many are there?" exclaimed Mr. Vere.

"One in each leg and three in his head, as they do say," replied the butler with growing animation.

"I must see him at once," said Mr. Vere, proceeding to finish his breakfast in haste; "he was to have started to-day for Liverpool, with some very important documents for Envoyse—for we have some very unpleasant—ugly matters, in fact, to disentagle; how the deuce can the catastrophe have occurred, in a country so quiet as this?"

"He probably became involved in some low quarrel," said Sir Cullender, with an angry gleam in his sloe-black eyes, for Lennard was no favourite of his, and Hesbia's interest—her too evident excitement and abstraction excited his suspicions; "there are, I hear, both poachers and gipsies in these parts."

"What was the cause, or whoever was the perpetrator," said Hesbia, "of one thing I am assured, the fault would not be Lennard's."

"Lennard's?" queried Sir Cullender, lifting his thick eyebrows.

"Yes—Mr. Lennard Blair," she added stoutly, her full, firm lips quivering, and her eyes sparkling.

"Like all your sex, you are delightfully and daringly irrational in your arguments as in your sympathies—your likings and dislikings," said Sir Cullender, with a quiet sneer in his tone and eye, as he played with the large signet-ring which bore his crest so ostentatiously, and the characteristic motto, *Facie tenus*, which has been translated as "up to the mark."

In her independence and impulsiveness, Hesbia would at that moment have put on her hat and shawl, and hastened on foot to Oakwoodlee, but something in the expression of Sir Cullender's sharp Jewish eyes arrested her, and she felt herself compelled to linger in the room, and hear a few remarks that passed between her father and the baronet, neither of whom felt their naturally fine appetites impaired either by Lennard's accident or Cheatwood's illness—and some of these remarks brought an angry blush to her cheek.

"If this fellow should die," the baronet began, while his nose seemed to become more hooked and an avaricious gleam passed over his eyes——

"Blair do you mean?"

"Yes—to whom would his little place at Oakwoodlee go?"

"I cannot say—but, though small, I know the place to be of more value than he deems it," said Vere.

"Ah! the coal seams lie that way."

"Exactly—under every foot of it. He has now not a relation in the world that I know of."

"To whom would it fall, then?" asked Sir Cullender.

"To the Crown as the ultimate heir."

"The deuce it would!"

"Of course—if he does not leave the place to two old servants who live there."

"Bah!" said the baronet, "where do people ever do such things, except in novels?"

"But you don't know these Blairs," replied Mr. Vere, manipulating his huge pockets full of loose silver; "his father was a strange, proud, and eccentric old fellow, with queer Scotch superstitions. He actually believed in the virtue or charm of possessing an old block of stone on his lands; in there being in each year an unlucky day for his family; and so forth. But with all his sound practical sense, Lennard Blair is quite capable of bestowing the remnant of his patrimony as I say."

"Unless——" and here the baronet paused, and gave a furtive glance at Hesbia.

"What, Sir Cullender?" she asked—"unless what?"

"He left it to *you*."

"Not unlikely, egad—they are such good friends," said Mr. Vere, in excellent humour at this idea, and the sudden prospect of obtaining the poor vineyard of Naboth.

While they conferred thus, there passed over Hesbia's fair face that undefinable expression which led so many to doubt her good birth and gentle breeding; it was genuine and honest scorn for the time, but it took the usual phase of defiance, of challenge, and of covert resistance.

"Maxwell, order round the carriage—no, the mail-phaeton will do," said Mr. Vere; "we shall drive down to Oakwoodlee immediately, and see about all this affair, which will certainly be one for official inquiry."

"And I, papa," said Hesbia, coming anxiously forward, "may I go too?"

"You surely are not in earnest?"

"Of course I am—why not? While with you there can be no impropriety in such a visit."

"Well—for the sake of the drive, you may accompany Sir Cullender and me," replied Mr. Vere, who thought if there was any prospect of wills being framed or bequests made, it might be advantageous if Lennard saw or knew that Hesbia was under his roof; and with the permission thus cunningly accorded, she hurried away to her own room, to exchange her morning dress for one more suitable to her visit.

Hesbia had much to think of—much that she dared scarcely to admit—even to herself. Lennard's non-appearance at the appointed place was now, poor fellow, fully accounted for, and the cause filled her with more of sympathy and with more of love for him, than she ever thought to have been inspired.

Until now, she never knew how much she really cared for Lennard Blair; or was it that they were both secluded in the country, and that she was without other objects or attractions? Perhaps that had much to do with the present amount of her tenderness and solicitude. The illness of Travice at this crisis was strange.

Savonette, Buttons the page, and the butler, too, had told her how white—how fearfully white his face was, how incoherent his manner, and how wild his eyes, as he made his way to bed last night; and Hesbia actually thought for a time that all these might be symptoms of a hopeless love for herself (and not the result of late hours, of selfish hate, and wholesome fear), and that her cousin had become a regular victim to his passion.

Suddenly an alarming idea—a terrible suspicion struck her, a new idea, at which she felt herself grow pale, and which she endeavoured to thrust aside as soon as it occurred. She remembered the fierce threat that Travice had made in the conservatory. Then a cry almost escaped her, as she rushed away to the gun-room, for, as in old Richard Blair's time, there was still an apartment of this kind in Blairavon, though casual guests alone used the weapons now. All the fowling-pieces, rifles and other firearms—even to some trophied muskets of the Russian war—were in their usual places; not one was missing, and a swift, keen glance at the locks of all showed Hesbia that not one had been used overnight. So Lennard Blair had been shot down, as she had been told, in a district where he had not an avowed enemy, but many, many friends—shot down and left to die, without further molestation; his watch, purse, and rings were all untouched, so plunder had not been the object; and he had fallen by an unseen hand, just as his favourite dog perished shortly before. The whole affair seemed the result of witchcraft—it was so mysterious and unaccountable.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VISITORS AT OAKWOODLEE.

Doctor Feverley was soon by the bedside of his friend, and after an examination, found that the bone of the thigh

had been severely fractured above the knee by a bullet, which was lodged in the wound, and the probing for which, with its subsequent extraction, caused the most exquisite agony, nor was it fairly brought forth until chloroform had been resorted to. It was then found to be a bullet of exactly the same kind as that by which the dog had been shot; conical in form, with a little wooden plug for expansion, it was marked with two letters, A A; and now the mystery of the affair was greatly increased.

"Truly, as Sterne says, 'We live in a world beset on all sides by mysteries and riddles,'" was the remark of Feverley as he surveyed the bullet.

"What the devil do you mean, Doctor?" asked Lennard, with a sigh of anger; "I have been shot at by some scoundrel——"

"Yes—by whom and for what?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well—is not one a mystery and the other a riddle?"

"But both shall be solved by the police."

And so, while Lennard lay abed, securely fixed with splints and bandages, a prey to pain, weariness, anger, and suspense, and, worse than all, afflicted by a fever, for which the cards left by a score of neighbours (even those of Hesbia) afforded little or no solace, great lumbering rural police, and sharp-witted little detectives, together with Mr. Grabbie, a local legal functionary and practitioner, hunted and scoured all the neighbourhood in vain.

The Reverend Doctor Kirkford, who had first found Lennard; Steinie and Elsie, who had seen him go forth hale, and well, and thereafter borne home faint and bloody; Doctor Feverley, with whom he had dined; and others who could have no possible means of knowing anything about the crime or the perpetrator of it, were precognosed, examined, and worried by the Sheriff-Substitute and Procurator-Fiscal, but in vain. Days passed on; nothing was discovered, and by the time he was able to leave his bed, and be seated in a chair for a few hours, "the mysterious case of shooting at Blairavon," as the local papers called it, was beginning to be forgotten by all save himself and his little circle. The authorities, of course, pretended to have "a clue" to the perpetrator, but always failed to follow it up. As a J.P. for the county, old Ranald Cheyne made himself very busy in the matter, and was unsparing in the expenditure of money and horseflesh, but to no purpose.

"By all that is atrocious!" said he one day, as he clutched

his hunting-whip in his energy, "such a crime as this never before disgraced the county, and the perpetrator must one day be discovered and brought to strict justice. But you are getting over it famously, Lennard, my boy; the bone and breeding of the Blairs are in you, and they never succumbed to anything. Your misfortune is likely to furnish talk for the fireside, the cover-side, and the harvest-field for many a day in West Lothian."

All this, though it soothed, failed to console Lennard; a foul wrong had been done him, by a secret hand, by some one unseen, and as yet unknown; he had thereby endured great suffering; was sorely wasted in body and "worried" in mind by the obscurity in which the outrage was involved.

It was a severe blow to be suddenly stricken down from health and strength to the extremity of helpless weakness, and to become, for a time, a lamed and bedridden man, with the chances of amputation—of death, perhaps, by fever, and to know also, that while all this was being endured he had been without the long wished-for explanation with Hesbia Vere. Then, when remembering her fickleness and coquetry—how many she was alleged to have jilted, even before girlhood was passed, he writhed on his pillow at the thought of her being left now entirely to the attentions of others, for though the mysterious Sir Cullender Crowdy had returned to London, new visitors of both sexes were at Blairavon. Among others, some of the Hussar officers from the barracks at Hamilton or Perth; but those men, he was told by Feverley, seemed to be somehow proof against the witcheries of their coquettish hostess. They shot and raced—it was not the hunting season—and while enjoying their wine, secretly voted "old Vere a bore." To Hesbia it was annoyingly evident that they preferred the Cheynes to herself.

"Why was this?" she one day inquired angrily of her cousin Travice, who was pleased to see her mortified, and who had won a small mint of money from the unsuspecting dragoons.

"The plain fact is, Hesbia, that in these girls those fellows find something more akin to themselves."

"How?"

"To their own order."

Then the old feeling came over Hesbia, and her eyes gleamed with their most unpleasant expression. Elsie and Steinie hung over Lennard even as his own father and mother would have done. In their earnest and loving old eyes there was ever an expression which seemed to say, "Oh,

if we could only die for you!" so great was their devotion to him, perhaps quite as much because he was the son of Richard Blair and one of the "old stock," as for any personal merits, though he was a very amiable and loveable young fellow. In the first days of his lassitude, pain, and fever, he seemed to be living over a portion of his past existence.

The smiles and tears of childhood seemed to return with those memories of the spring of life when he had been going step by step along a flowery path towards its summer; but ever and anon, among old familiar sounds, such as the cawing of the rooks without, the creaking of a vane overhead, the patter of rain on the roof, the sough of the wind in the pine-woods, with the voices of Elsie and Steinie, *others* seemed to mingle—others that were stilled for ever; so, in his delirium, he would fancy that the years which had passed were rolled back, and that he was a child again, with Elsie his nurse as of old singing him to sleep in the same room and the same bed where he had often cowered in the winter nights, with fears of the spunkies and spectres, and other pre-railway phantoms, who had long made the vicinity of Blairavon their abode.

Elsie Graham was much mollified in her views of Miss Vere, who daily sent Maxwell or Mademoiselle Savonette with inquiries, cards, and occasionally comfits and cordials, and who frequently came in person to ask for Lennard, but, of course, never alone, as she had always with her Flora Cheyne or Mr. Vere; and on one of those occasions, when the latter spoke of the affairs of the firm at home, and of the forgery which was yet involved in so much mystery, Lennard could perceive that his agitation was visible through even his long-practised and habitual system of self-control, and that the loose silver was jingled in his pocket more vigorously, but more abstractedly, than ever.

During one of the early days of Lennard's convalescence, when he could sit in an arm-chair under the drooping laburnum and fragrant lilac-trees near the door of Oakwoodlee, and enjoy a cigar in the bright sunshine, or the cool breeze that came from the belt of pines around the Charter Stone, he received a visit from Hesbia, who was accompanied on this occasion by the daughters of Ranald Cheyne and by—her cousin Travice Cheatwood!

The postman had just brought a letter, which Lennard perceived was from Mr. Dabchick, but he had not time to glance at its contents (fortunately, perhaps, though they were, in one instance, very important), for he heard the

voice of Hesbia, and a thrill passed through his breast; he thrust the letter into his pocket-book, and grasped the knobs of his arm-chair in a feeble, and, as it proved, vain attempt to rise, when she, with her three companions, crossed the little piece of green sward to the place where he sat under the trees. So Lennard Blair was fairly out of danger! Travice Cheatwood felt, for the time, out of it too; and so all his old hatred had returned with renewed force.

"Exposed me, did he!" thought he, again and again; "exposed me, and saved those beggarly snobs, Dabchick and Feverley, from the unmerciful 'milking' I had in store for them (and himself too). Well, I shot surely, and he'll never trump that card, confound him!"

Travice had been posted recently as a turf-defaulter on the course at the Derby, Epsom, and Catterick Bridge—posted beyond remedy or avail; for though he had heard of other persons taking high grounds, instructing their solicitors to sue, and so forth, no such method was open to him. He could only grind his teeth—grin and bear it.

"When things are at the very worst," thought he, "they are almost sure to mend; and perhaps it may be so with my affairs. I have still my chances with Hesbia; and when all is lost or over, I can at least levant to the diggings or the land of the Stripes and Stars!"

Such were the thoughts that flitted through the mind of Travice as he approached the invalid—his victim,—who sat almost powerless in his cushioned arm-chair, his slippered feet upon a stool, a stick and crutch by his side; his straight features, in their pallor and thinness, looking straighter than ever; his eyes with the glare and hollowness of suffering apparent in them; his hair uncut, and, like his beard and moustache, looking, as Hesbia thought, unpleasantly ample; while his tasselled *robe-de-chambre* flapped loosely and widely about his attenuated limbs. Hesbia and the Cheynes approached and greeted him with genuine kindness and commiseration expressed in their charming faces, and their inquiries and congratulations were uttered with such real interest and feeling, that Lennard felt his heart beat happily, and he even held out his hand with forgiveness to Cheatwood, thinking the while, as old Steinie hobbled forth from the house with chairs, how the appearance of the three fashionable-looking girls in their light summer dresses, smart hats and feathers, and perfect toilettes, from their gathered hair to their tiny Balmoral boots, made gay and bright the exterior of his somewhat lonely and old-fashioned place.

On this day Hesbia had almost to compel Travice Cheatwood to accompany her, nor would she listen to one word of the quarrel which he openly alleged as the reason of his having no desire to meet Blair again ; while his secret one was his dislike, aversion, and fear to meet face to face one whom he had wronged in a mode so dastardly. But he found there was nothing for him but to trust to Blair's generosity for silence concerning the écarté, and to escort Hesbia, who, more by chance than motive, had reminded him of the threat he uttered in the conservatory on a certain night ; and Travice, when she did so, changed colour, or rather lost it, most visibly.

"I bear you no malice for our shindy, Blair," said he, presenting his hand ; "écarté is an ugly game, and no born Briton is ever really master of it as it is essentially French. Sorry to hear of all you have suffered in this devilish affair ; hope you'll soon be quite well."

"Thanks. Hand chairs to the ladies, please—nearer me. Steinie has placed them half-a-mile distant."

While Travice with nervous haste was placing the chairs, Hesbia's eyes beamed kindly into Lennard's, as she said in a rapid whisper,—"I was not far from you on that fatal night."

"Indeed——"

"I was at the stile on the road to the craig—*you know the place*—and actually heard your cry."

"Thanks for telling me so, Hesbia," said he with a sigh ; and a quick, but unseen, pressure of their hands closed the secret intelligence, which brought a flush to Lennard's cheek and a lustre to his eye.

Travice Cheatwood, bent on making a good impression, was "got up" even more carefully than usual, in a suit of lilac-coloured tweed, a white vest, a slender blue silk tie drawn through a ruby ring ; a wide-awake hat, with an eye glass screwed into the rim thereof ; lavender-coloured gloves, with elaborate black seams ; glazed boots, and a tooth-pick umbrella. His goatee-beard was carefully trimmed, and while doing his best to preserve a nonchalant bearing, there was a restlessness apparent in his eyes and manner. Flora Cheyne and her younger sister were gentle and lady-like girls. To a close observer, even to Lennard's lover-eyes, it was evident that, while infinitely less beautiful than Hesbia, there was about them less of that bearing of perpetual self-assertion which distinguished the heiress of Blairavon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LENNARD OBTAINS A CLUE.

AFTER a few commonplaces were uttered, kind enquiries made, and messages given, by the three ladies, Mr. Cheatwood feeling all the awkwardness of his position, notwithstanding his profound assurance, found an absolute necessity for saying something, more especially as Lennard's eye had twice regarded him with an expression of calm, cold scrutiny; he therefore observed,—

"Singularly enough, I happened to be in the fields when this unhappy affair occurred, Mr. Blair; and, like Miss Vere, I was not far from the spot."

"Indeed," replied Lennard; "this is the first time I have heard of the circumstance. Your name did not appear among the precognitions of the Procurator."

"Oh yes, but he *was* in the fields on that evening," said Flora Cheyne, with a readiness that won her the gratitude of Mr. Cheatwood, "for about the very time you were attacked, he was at the Haughs with some music for me."

This was not strictly true according to time; but her reply greatly encouraged Cheatwood, who resumed,—

"It has been a serious business this of yours, Blair."

"Serious, indeed—Feverley, it seems, at one time was sorely afraid of gangrene setting in, and then nothing could have saved me but immediate amputation."

"Poor Mr. Blair!" said Hesbia; "all your round dancing would have been at an end then."

"But you are getting rapidly better, Mr. Blair—and we are so delighted to see it," lisped Flora Cheyne.

"Yes—thanks to Frank Feverley; among all the thousands of practitioners on the human race, I do not think I could have found a more careful fellow. I can absolutely move my leg a little to-day!"

And, making a most horrible grimace while he did so, Lennard lifted his foot about two inches from the soft stool on which it rested.

"All right, old fellow—never say die!" exclaimed Cheatwood, patting him on the back,—a patronizing process which Lennard never relished, save from intimate friends, and under which he winced now, as he detested Cheatwood's slangy and free-and-easy style; "You'll be up and about in a week or two; but you are in comfortable diggings—this queer old bunk of your father's—and so should take your

own time of turning up at Vere and Co.'s, in the old alley at Liverpool."

"Can this really be the rascal I suspect him?" thought Lennard.

"As soon as you are able to move a little, remember that the carriage is quite at your disposal—papa told me to say so," said Hesbia.

"And *my* papa desired me to place my bay pad at your service, as a first mount," said Flora Cheyne, with a little blush; "it is quiet as a lamb, Mr. Blair, and rides on a snaffle."

"Have a weed," said Travice, opening his cigar case and proffering it, ere Lennard could thank the ladies; "Hesbia and Miss Cheyne will, of course, excuse us here in the open air—you are forbidden to smoke—"

"More than one—thanks—and I have already done so."

"But, Mr. Blair," said Flora, looking into Lennard's face with her dark eyes full of interest; "is it quite the case that, as papa says, you did not hear a report when shot down?"

"I heard nothing—saw nothing!"

"You are quite certain?"

"Quite; I heard no sound, but the cry of pain that escaped me," added Lennard, glancing at Hesbia.

"How doocid odd!" commented Travice, as he carefully bit off the end of a cigar, and proceeded to light it. Turning again to Lennard, with the fixed eye-glass shining in his eye, imparting thereby a grotesquely sinister glare to his expression, he asked, "have you no suspicions of any one?"

"There are times when I have."

"Times only?"

"It is awkward, without solid proof, to bring forward an accusation of guilt, Mr. Cheatwood."

"Of course—of course," replied Travice, composedly puffing his cigar; "the pitmen hereabout are, I have heard, a rough lot; but every man must be held innocent till he is found guilty."

"And, in doubtful cases," continued Lennard, with a peculiar smile, "we have in Scotland, as in France, an ugly but neccssary verdict—'not proven.'"

Travice Cheatwood thought of Dabchick, and in his heart anathematized all law in general, and Scotch law in particular.

"Beyond acceptances too often protested, I have had little to do with the law," said Travice, with a tone of retort; "because, like your worthy father—"

"My father?" interrupted Lennard sharply, with a reddening of his pale cheek, and an emphasis on the words.

"Yes—I have been, like him, animated by a gentlemanly love of spending much and making little."

The remark, though smilingly made, simply originated in Travice's desire to be impertinent. He saw the feverish hectic of suppressed irritation in the now usually pale cheek of Blair; but pity he had none, and all fear for himself had, in this instance, completely passed away.

"Listen," said Hesbia, during an unpleasant pause, while the cooing of the cushat-doves came softly out of the Blairavon woods; "listen to the sweet notes of the wood pigeons."

"How romantic—bah!" was the blunt reply; "I like them best when their toes are peeping up through a covering of good puff-paste."

"Just as those white lambs which dot the green sward in the foreground would please you better with the accompaniments of green pease and mint sauce."

"Precisely, my dear cousin; and you might add, with a glass of good dry sherry."

"You have charming tastes, Travice!" said Hesbia, opening and shutting her parasol with an air of annoyance, and fearful that he might commit himself unpleasantly, as a sullen expression was beginning to gather in his eye; so with the kindest manner she could assume, she now rose to retire, giving a promise of coming soon again—a promise which kindled a glow of love and gratitude in Lennard's heart.

"Travice," said she, angrily, as they quitted Oakwoodlee by the wicket which opened into the highway, "you are remarkably cool over all this painful affair of Mr. Blair's."

"Cool!—yes, as a dog's nose at Christmas—why should I be otherwise?" he asked, tipping the ashes from his cigar by the ivory handle of his "toothpick" umbrella; "my own affairs are quite worry enough for me, and it happens that just at present my betting-book is not the most pleasant reading in the world, and is likely to continue to be so, unless I can get a lady with a jolly pot of money to take pity upon me for better or worse."

"Oh, fie; how mercenary!" said Flora Cheyne, holding up a tiny finger in mock rebuke. "Is not money the root of all evil?"

"So says the nursery rhyme—and so say the parsons, too—but how the deuce is one to get along without it?"

"True," sighed Hesbia, as she thought of all the luxuries

by which she was surrounded, which were now the necessities of her existence, and which she knew Lennard Blair could never yield her, unaided by her father, and from him there had been dropping many unpleasant hints of losses and money disasters of late!

After his three visitors had left him, Lennard sat long in a pleasant reverie, thinking over all that Hesbia had said, for though she had uttered but commonplaces, she had a modulation of voice and a varying power of eye, that lent point to her most trivial remarks; her smiles had been winning and tender—too winning and too tender to suit the taste of one who detected them, Travice—her kind manner, and the honest warmth of her parting hope that he would be able to visit them at Blairavon, as the carriage was at his disposal, more than ever won poor Lennard's heart, and feeling that for her sake he could quite forgive even the uncourteous and dishonourable conduct of her cousin, he forgot all about the letter of the fussy little barrister, and sat in a long and happy reverie, listening to the rustle of the green leaves overhead, the soft cooing of the cushat-doves, and the murmur of the adjacent stream as it chafed over its bed of brown pebbles.

To have excited so much interest in Hesbia's breast, and won so much of her sympathy, made Lennard think that all he had suffered had not been endured in vain, or without a pleasing reward. At last he proceeded with half vacant interest to unfold and read the dapper lawyer's epistle, and while doing so the piping falsetto voice, the general meekness of visage, and great pomposity of bearing, which were characteristic of the writer, came to memory. Like many of the great obscure, even in these practical days, Dabchick affected heraldry; thus his note-paper was adorned with no less than three crests, one for each of his names, in chief being a chicken *proper*, for the noble line of Dabchick. Lennard could have laughed at this display, but a pallor settled gradually over his face, as he read the letter, one part of which closely affected himself.

"Everything is dull here, and as usual the streets of Edinburgh look about as crowded at noon as those of London do at four o'clock in the morning; and nothing is doing in our courts, for yearly our legal profession is going more and more to the dogs, and the honourable position of the Scottish Bar becomes more and more traditional—a thing of the past!' *Oremus pro paupertate Edinensi!*"

Dabchick was evidently discontented; he had not been retained in the only case of which he had a chance of figuring

in since his "call to the Bar," the right of way to the mains of Kaims.

"How fares it with la belle Hesbia? Some cavalry men from Perth barracks, or from those at John's Lodge (near Edinburgh), are at Blairavon, I hear; so the old game of furious flirting will, no doubt, be a-foot, and we civilians nowhere."

"John's Lodge—pitiful snob!" muttered Lennard, who knew the Scotch, or local name of the barrack referred to; "but what the deuce is this?"

"I heard of your accident through the papers, and have since learned from Feverley when he was in town for a day, that you were fast progressing to convalescence. Pray accept alike my condolence, and congratulation. I always feared that a certain party, from whose extreme sharpness at cards you saved both the Doctor and me, would work you a mischief. In fact, on that night, I saw it in his eyes, and we lawyers can read a man as a book. Are you aware that once when getting a fishing-rod out of *his* room at Blairavon, I found among his other appurtenances an—air-gun.

"*An air-gun!*" exclaimed Lennard, starting so convulsively, that for some minutes his wounded limb gave him exquisite torture.

Here there was a clue to the whole affair, and though the lawyer had been too cautious to commit the name to paper, Lennard knew that Travice Cheatwood had been the villain who wounded him—who had contemplated alike the gratification of a revenge and the removal of a rival by deliberate assassination; and yet, not an hour since, he had stood smiling and talking by his side, offering him a cheroot, patting him on the shoulder, and warmly shaking his hand prior to departure.

And now Lennard remembered the bitter threat Travice had made to Hesbia in the conservatory. It seemed but empty sound then, though it had a terrible significance now.

At the hand of Travice, then, had he endured all this peril, all this suffering, and misery of mind and body, this deprivation of light and air, and sunshine—a bed-ridden patient—for so many days! An access of his fever almost came upon him—so keen was his sense of wrong, so fiery his resentment, so determined was he on a terrible retribution! He must go to Blairavon, reach unseen the rooms of Travice Cheatwood in his absence, secure the silent proofs against him, and try if the two bullets he possessed fitted the muzzle of that murderous and illegal weapon, beneath which he had so nearly perished. Then came a dread lest Cheatwood might have destroyed or concealed it beyond all chance of discovery. However, that he should not mar his own purposes, he felt the imperative necessity of being

patient, calm and wary, and of keeping for a time his own counsel; and he did so, concealing his suspicions from Feverley, from Hesbia, and even veiling his emotions to Travice himself, though never again would he permit the hand of that personage to touch his, when they met or parted.

"Till the fitting time comes, I shall speak of this to no one—for a secret ceases to be such when shared by another."

And he folded and docketed the letter of Mr. Dabchick, ere he locked it in his desk, with all the precision he had acquired in the house of Vere and Co.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONVALESCENT.

NOTWITHSTANDING that his offers and attentions had been declined, at first jocularly and then very angrily and decidedly, by his cousin Hesbia, Travice Cheatwood—that man of dark purposes and desperate fortune—still continued to reside at Blairavon, where his presence was tolerated by Mr. Vere out of mercy to a dead sister's memory, though he was by no means an over-indulgent uncle, and certainly had no suspicion of the matrimonial schemes which the plotting brain of his nephew might conceive, while he knew, moreover, that Hesbia was quite able to take care of herself.

Travice had no fine feelings to blunt; after being so decidedly, almost contemptuously refused by Hesbia, a real lover would have quitted her presence for ever; but Travice was little more than a desperate money-hunter, and willing enough to accept a fortune of his uncle's making, and to take it encumbered with such a charming appendage as Hesbia; so he lingered on at Blairavon—in fact he had, at present, nowhere else to go. The atmosphere of Liverpool and of London also being alike too hot for him, he had the pretence of a country visit to remain where he was, and resolved to protract it to the last day.

Perhaps the first ramble in which Lennard indulged—when, after nearly two months of convalescence in an armchair, and in hobbling about the grounds of Oakwoodlee on crutches, he was able to walk abroad with the aid of a staff—was to the spot where he had been shot down, in the little pathway that led through the fields to Craigellon. It was now nearly the end of July, and, through various contingencies, he had never found a proper opportunity for recurring pointedly with Hesbia to the object of that assignation which she, apparently, had kept, while he had been com-

pelled to fail ; and latterly a fear had haunted him that the Vere household would return to Liverpool, leaving him with his secret untold—his story unsaid to Hesbia ; for already their periodical visit to Blairavon was protracted long beyond the usual time, for Mr. Vere's mind scemed much occupied by developing to their utmost, the resources of the coal mines at the Mains of Kaims.

As Lennard stood in the solitary path, vividly the memory of the shock he had undergone, with all its pain and bewilderment, came upon him. He surveyed the place and saw the exact spot where he fell, recognizing the chestnut trees, the branches of which had interposed between him and the sky as he lay prostrate among the long grass; and again, as on that eventful evening, the last red rays of the sun were fading from the flinty brow of Craigellon, and at a distance he could perceive the sequestered stile where Hesbia had awaited him, and heard, without understanding it, his cry of dismay. But for that atrocious act of Travice Cheatwood, the meeting had taken place, and Lennard had been now the accepted lover of Hesbia Vere,—or have known the worst, and left her sphere for ever.

By the wayside the thistles were in full flower, the summer grasses in the fields were deep and dewy, and the fledgling partridges whirred up from them in brown coveys ; but the mavis and merle had ceased to sing now, for the dog-days were setting in and the golden butterflies and dragon-moths fluttered about lazily in the last light of the sun.

As Lennard, with an eye rendered keen and sharp by long suffering, surveyed the spot where he had lain till found by Doctor Kirkford, something glittering among the grass that grew thick about the roots of the hedge close by caught his attention. It proved to be a gold sleeve link, to which was attached the fragment of a cuff, frittered and frayed by two months' exposure to the wind and rain. To the link were two small Indian gold coins, and from what remained of the cuff, which was of fine linen, it appeared to have been neatly edged, or bordered with dark needlework.

How carelessly detectives and others had examined the scene of his suffering the discovery of this relic evinced.

Lennard had a vague recollection of having seen such cuffs and sleeve links worn by Travice Cheatwood ; and, after a longer and more careful scrutiny of the place, he placed what he had found in his pocket-book, as another link in the necessary chain of evidence, and turned homeward.

"How rarely do our instincts mislead us!" thought Lennard ; "and I always hated that fellow!"

He was frequently tempted to make a confidant of Feverley, and ask his advice; but as further proofs were still wanting whereby to criminate Cheatwood (and could he do so without disgracing Hesbia?) he resolved to wait a little; yet on the very night of this fresh discovery near the scene of his attempted assassination, he was nearly tempted into additional confidence by the friendly and trusting manner of the young Doctor, who dropped into Oakwoodlee, as he frequently did, on his way home to the village.

"You are somewhat moody and silent, Frank," said Lennard, who perceived that the Doctor sat with an air of abstraction, smoking and sipping his wine.

"Moody, am I? perhaps I am a little weary," replied Feverley; "I have had many patients to visit to-day—and the days of July are long and hot."

He tipped the ashes from his cigar, sighed, and relapsed into silence.

"There is something else than medical visiting in your mind," said Lennard; "did you observe anything that interested you in yesterday's paper?"

Feverley changed colour visibly.

"I observed," said he, "that old Sir Philip Wharton Foster had been struck with paralysis at Monkwood in the Merse——"

"And was so dangerously ill that he was not expected to survive."

"He died the same night," said Feverley in a faint voice; "I read his name in the obituary this morning. Poor old man—don't talk about it."

"Why?" asked Lennard somewhat vacantly.

"Because—it must be a severe blow to—to—his wife."

"Your cousin—your cousin Milly Montgomerie of the Moat. Ah, Frank! I have not forgotten your sad little love story, and that untoward meeting at Blairavon."

Feverley, who had grown very pale, started a little, as Lennard could perceive by the light of the candles, and he strove to dismiss from his mind the subject on which he had no intention of talking; but the poor Doctor was only human, and he could not resist the current of the thoughts that came unbidden to his mind.

After a pause, during which he had pushed aside the wine decanter, and mixed for himself a rummer of whiskey and water, he said in a voice that was broken in tone—"I certainly have no reason to mourn the demise of Sir Philip Foster. That marriage of my cousin Milly to him, when I was far away in the Greenland seas, off Spitzbergen Peaks

and Davis's Straits, was an act of atrocious cruelty on the part of her father, and may God forgive him (I never can) for all he made us endure; but Sir Philip was rich and I was poor—yea, poor as Job—and what right have the poor to possess either hearts or feelings, wants or wishes?"

Lennard sighed, for after his late sufferings he was easily depressed; he thought of his own chances and hopes in relation to Hesbia Vere; and, somehow, on hearing the tone of Feverley's voice, and the hollow bitterness it possessed, his heart sank within him for a time.

"I thought I had got over all the bitterness of our first great sorrow when separated by the Indian seas, and, as I supposed, for ever; I had learned to be content—always cheerful—even happy at times, as you have seen, for a gloomy doctor had better try some other art than that of healing; but still, in my lonely moments, the past was ever before me, vividly and sorrowfully."

"And now that obituary in the newspapers has brought back all the memories—all the past—in full tide like a summer's flood."

"Exactly."

There was another pause, till Lennard said, "Lady Foster will be a free woman—a wealthy widow now. Her stern and courtly old husband she may—nay, must—have respected, but never loved."

"Respected?" said Feverley, bitterly; "I have my doubts if, in her darker hours—and dark hours she must have had—poor Milly could have respected him; for he took her at her father's bidding and from his merciless and avaricious hands, after a long course of domestic tyranny and systematic oppression; and only the stern consciousness that she had perhaps anticipated her revenge, made her go through the mockery of a holy rite at the altar with him, Philip Wharton Foster; but peace be with him now!

. . If I have suffered much, Milly has suffered more! I have had the world of active life, such as it is with me here, to engage me—a world where I can at least be useful and merciful to my fellow-men; and in seeking to relieve, so far as I may, the ills that flesh is heir to, forget the keener pangs that have wrung my own heart. I had this resource left me; but she—she—had only the consciousness that her young life had been utterly cast away!"

The Doctor's pale face flushed as thoughts came fast upon him; and he seemed, as he paused from time to time, with his cold and forgotten cigar between his fingers, to be speaking to himself as much as to Blair.

"Never shall I forget, Lennard, if I were to live for a century, the memories of those nightly meetings, stolen in secrecy, in sorrow and rapture, in the bower at Monkwood Moat—her despairing appeals to God, and to me—poor helpless wretch that I was!—not to leave her—her lips pressed to my cheek—her imploring voice—her clinging gestures—her declarations that she was mine and mine only; the fire of her spirit and her energy, as contrasted with her *petite* figure and delicate beauty,—yes, the memories of all those hours of passion are ever with me, in one of those secret places of the soul, which we can open and shut at pleasure, and keep unknown to all the world, Blair!"

"'All's well that ends well,'" said Lennard; "and we have yet to see the end of all this. The old man has gone to his last account, and we may freely say, 'God rest him, now;' but there can be selfishness in——"

"Hush! say no more, if you love me, Blair," said the Doctor, starting up; "I have dread enough of my own new thoughts, and shrink from having them fashioned into words by another."

"You may yet be very happy, Feverley."

"Perhaps; but worldly happiness, I fear,—

> "'It is the gay *to-morrow* of the mind,
> That never comes.'"

Soon after this, Feverley made a hurried departure; and though his manner, his story, and his confidences might have lured Lennard Blair to speak again of his own aspirations towards Miss Vere and of his grave suspicions concerning her reckless cousin, he still delayed. Hence, in the matter he lost the valuable advice of Feverley, through whose calmer judgment means might have been taken for the suitable exposure and punishment of Travice Cheatwood—most certainly for his final expulsion, at least; and thus the great catastrophe which afterwards ensued might happily have been avoided.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH.

THE happiest period, perhaps, of Lennard Blair's life, as yet, was now to come; and if ever lover had the field entirely to himself it was he; for much about the time that he became well enough to stir abroad, though still too feeble and ailing to return to Liverpool, a telegram from Mr.

Envoyse summoned Mr. Vere to that place for an indefinite term; and Travice Cheatwood, to recruit his resources, had followed to Perth or Piershill Barracks some of his recently-made cavalry acquaintances, whose I O U's he held for more than a thousand pounds, and who had not, as yet, discovered his peculiar proclivities, or that his name had figured so unpleasantly on the course at Epsom and elsewhere. Prior, however, to Mr. Vere's departure, a little speculation in a piece of land which he had long coveted was agreeably achieved.

Mr. Vere had not been so blind as to fail in perceiving that Lennard Blair had a great *tendresse* for Hesbia; but, as he had certain views regarding her, and other intentions concerning him, he tolerated their intimacy because, as Hesbia was somewhat self-willed, it might have been difficult of prevention; and having long wished to obtain possession of Oakwoodlee, of which he had no hope during the life of Richard Blair, he now resolved to lose no time in setting about it, especially as he had ascertained secretly and satisfactorily the dip of the coal-seams in that direction.

It had been said of Vere that, through life, "he was ever great in traffic, had a keen eye to business, knew his Bible by rote, and never failed in getting a slice off every cut loaf for himself." Yet ready money had mysteriously become scarce in his hands of late; all his private resources had been turned to the development of the coal-pits, and Lennard had seen with regret that nearly all the grand old oaks—the woods of Blairavon, once his father's pride—had become timber for sale under axe and saw.

As Hislop said, with a groan and with unintentional wit, "nothing would be left but the genealogical tree, and even the last branch of that was not a flourishing one."

"Yes, Steinie, and the dule-tree yet remains," replied Lennard, with a grim smile as he referred to the old gallows-yew on which the lairds of Blairavon had executed justice on their vassals in the times of old.

On the first day he dined at the manor-house after his partial recovery—though he had to walk there and back with the assistance of Steinie's arm—when the cloth was removed, Mr. Vere resolved to speak to Lennard of the affair that occupied his mind. The fat, solemn, and would-be dignified, but nevertheless servile butler, in his accurate suit of black and amplitude of white waistcoat, thinking himself in all—save purse—quite the equal of those he condescended to attend, dispensed the wine, and duly arranged the decanters before his master. He was a white-haired,

bald-headed, sleek and selfish specimen of his class, looking "forrard to keeping his own 'otel some fine day with Mamselle Savonette as its missus," for her savings, perquisites, and peculations, when added to his own, would make a tolerable sum; and now he hovered at Mr. Vere's back, till told that he might withdraw, a hint on which Mr. Maxwell acted to; and as Hesbia and Flora Cheyne were already in the drawing-room, Lennard found himself alone with Mr. Vere, who hospitably pressed him to take wine again and again.

Playing with the grape-scissors or a wine-glass in one hand, while the other was plunged among the loose silver in his pocket, Mr. Vere said—"Now that we are quite alone, I wish to speak with you on a subject which may prove greatly to your future advantage; but which, with your local prejudices, and family sympathies, you may consider one of delicacy."

Mr. Vere paused and Lennard bowed, and assisted himself to grapes.

"I have some advice to offer."

"Say on, sir," said Lennard, half suspecting and dreading the nature of it.

"In fact, Blair, I hope you won't think—even as a father, and many years your senior—that I take a premature or unjustifiable liberty in talking of it at all."

"Can it be my regard for Hesbia to which he refers?" thought Lennard, whose heart had begun to beat wildly during all this preamble, but who was somewhat relieved when he found the subject was Oakwoodlee, one he had already mentioned once before.

"The estate of Blairavon is incomplete without those few acres of the old Jointure House, which it surrounds on every side. Hand these over to me, Blair, and I shall assign you their full value—as made up by a surveyor, or other competent person—in further shares or interest in our firm, which must yield you a much greater return than such a patch of land can ever do. At present I am able to indicate, if you would prefer it, a splendid investment in a monetary point of view. You know how successful the line of steamers from Panama to Australia has proved, creating the necessity for a connecting link between the Isthmus of Panama and New York, the Cunard line having decided upon running a branch line in conjunction with the mail steamers from the United States to London. You understand me?"

"I think I do, sir."

"Take your wine; the port stands with you. Well, my

friend, Sir Cullender Crowdy, has a new and original scheme for a line of screw-propeller packets, from the Mersey direct to Carthagina, and on through the Carribean Sea, touching at Cuba, San Domingo, and so forth, through the Straits of Bahama and so on to Boston, and thence back to England. Packets, the engines of which will be worked without steam or coal, or fuel of any kind, by an entirely new motive principle—a system of condensed air, known to a very few—and so cheap in its operation that we cannot fail to destroy the enterprize of the great British and North American Royal Mail Steam Company, unless they are pleased to amalgamate and cast their lot with us; and then we shall have in our own hands the entire steam-navigation round the habitable globe!"

Listening to all this like one in a dream, to Lennard the vaunted speculation sounded unpleasantly like the enterprizing Captain Hawksley's famous galvanic scheme; but though his faith in Mr. Vere was great, he eminently disliked the baronet's name or share in any plan or enterprize whatever. He sat silent, and knew not how to reply.

"By bold speculation large fortunes alone are made now," said Mr. Vere; "but if shares in this proposed new South and North-Atlantic Packet Company are not to your taste, you may place the money you receive for Oakwoodlee into the old firm—"

"That I should prefer infinitely," replied Lennard; "for with the scheme of Sir Cullender I shall have nothing whatever to do!" Mr. Vere winced at this remark, and knit his brows. "And now when I remember the last words of my father, poor old man, I have sore compunction in assenting to part with the last fragment of Blairavon."

"Blairavon is gone," said Mr. Vere, tartly; "it is no use crying over spilt milk."

"But it is hard that poor little Oakwoodlee should follow."

"Think of the result—the return for your money; it may be sufficient in time to enable you to buy two such places as Blairavon, and certainly twenty times such as Oakwoodlee. Besides, you are young, and cannot see your future. When you have cleared up some of those cloudy matters which shall be put in your hands for elucidation at Vera Cruz, and established a branch of our house there—if all turns out as well as I expect, you will find the result of the confidence we have placed in you pleasant, I am assured, in more ways than one."

Lennard's heart beat lightly and happily as he immediately applied this vague promise to the position of himself and Hesbia; but there was one remark of his father's con-

cerning her, which came like water on the rising flame, and repressed by pride the avowal that was trembling on his tongue, so he filled and drank his glass of wine in silence.

"I should like your decision soon," said Mr. Vere, after a pause.

"Give me one day to think over it—to take counsel with myself?"

"Then one only, as I leave for Liverpool by an early train to-morrow, and hope you will not be long after me—three weeks more should see your health quite restored."

"I hope so, sir."

"Well, then, we shall have the land valued; the sum agreed upon assigned to you, or placed by Envoyse to your credit in the funds of Vere and Co. I shall assume that you only want time to make up your mind—not that you will change it."

Mr. Vere went to a side table, opened a magnificent walnut davenport-desk—and while the voice of Hesbia, as she sang at the piano, came floating from time to time through the folding-doors of the drawing-room, he made a jotting of the proposed transaction which Lennard Blair initialled. So now, perhaps, even the Charter Stone was about to go—that palladium and old Druidical monolith, the legends and memories concerning which went beyond even the days of our Saviour.

But Lennard was in love, and "all books—even novels—will tell you that a man in love is not a good judge of what he is doing." Perhaps, but for the voice that thrilled in his ears and in his heart, Lennard might have declined the whole transaction.

In the little oak-panelled parlour at Oakwoodlee, Lennard sat long that night, pondering over all Mr. Vere had said, the promises he had made, the hopes he had held out, and others vaguely hinted; and weighed all against his father's dying injunctions never to part with Oakwoodlee. But was he actually parting with it in spirit, if the value thereof was invested in a firm of which he, himself, would one day be an active, a prominent, and perhaps ultimately surviving partner? More than all, if he succeeded in gaining the love and hand of Hesbia Vere, Oakwoodlee and more would be her portion; and if he lost her, of what value would life be? He thought long and regretfully over the matter, and finally resolved that he would fully accede to Mr. Vere's wish; yet that in memory of his father's wish and the old family tradition, he would reserve the Charter Stone!

Lennard actually blushed when he spoke of the proposed

transaction to old Steinie Hislop, for whose startled look he was quite prepared, and to whom he felt himself compelled to frame a specious story to the effect that out of the return the investment would bring him, he should be enabled to purchase an estate six times larger than the patch of grass and coppice called Oakwoodlee.

"Better a wee bush than nae bield," responded Steinie, in doubt, as he shook his white head thoughtfully.

"With Oakwoodlee, Steinie, I should be but a bonnet laird after all, with—as the proverb of family pride has it—'a wee pickle land, a gude pickle debt and a dooeot.'"

"But hold ye by the Charter Stone, Mr. Lennard, for if other saws say true, gude will ever come o' that."

"Whether or not Oakwoodlee goes from me, you and Elsie shall never want while I live," said Lennard; "and I must tell you, Steinie, that, though feeling compunction for so soon violating—if it can be deemed so—my father's last wish in parting with this poor fragment of all that once was ours—I will realize quadruple its value in another fashion, and with that, his dreams of wealth and station; and I feel grateful to Mr. Vere for affording me such an opportunity."

But again the old man shook his head doubtfully, for his instincts made him cautious, and his years of hopefulness were passed away.

When next they met, and Lennard hesitatingly—for he had a sensitive dread of ridicule—spoke of his wish to retain a right of proprietary over the Charter Stone, Mr. Vere first smiled, and then laughed outright. It seemed to him a queer affair altogether, as he was too much a man of the day-book and ledger to understand anything about a sentimental investment such as this, unless Lennard conceived, as he laughingly hinted, that "there was a good pot of money hid under the old block." However, he agreed to let him retain it as his own, and shook his hand with a warmth and cordiality that made him feel quite happy. Mr. Vere then sprang into the carriage which was to take him to the train for Carlisle and the south, and they separated.

Vere had lost no time in leaving ample instructions; so through the medium of Mr. Gideon—or, as he was locally named, Juden—Grabbie, a species of lawyer in the village of Blairavon, the deeds of transfer or sale were drafted, or partially drawn out, to be further executed and completed by a more experienced conveyancer, and duly recorded in form of law, as Mr. Grabbie could not act legally as a writer or procurator; and then Oakwoodlee passed like Blairavon out of the line of Blair for ever—Blairavon that for centuries had been the home of a race that, until the days of

poor, simple, and unthrifty Richard Blair, had never known reverse, save such as were common enough in the old cut-and-thrust days of English invasion and domestic raid. It passed away, all save the Charter Stone, and a saturnine smile spread over the coarse visage of Mr. Juden Grabbie, as he penned the clause, wherein "the said Lennard Blair, reserved to himself, his heirs, executors, and assigns, the upright pillar or block, known as the Charter Stone, with a space of six feet around the same, in perpetuity;" for Grabbie, whose father had been a rat-catcher and earth-stopper on the estate, knew the tradition well; but he valued as lightly as Mr. Vere the sentiment or superstition which led Blair to retain it. Yet it was in something of the same spirit which has inspired many old Highland families, whose estates have passed from them, to retain a rock, an islet, or a burial-place; as the family of Borthwick still retain the mere rock and ruin of that name near Edinburgh, when all else—even their title—has passed away.

So Lennard soon found himself a species of visitor, or tenant under the roof that had once been his own; and a time came—but he then was far away—when the old family portraits, after being touched up by Sanders M'Gilp, R.S.A., were removed again to Blairavon, to form the nucleus of an ancestral gallery for the new proprietor, and when the pictures of Richard Blair's favourite hunters and racers, with many similar sporting relics, were sold to adorn the walls of the village inn, and those of its less pretentious rival, the alehouse, where many a time, when the Atlantic lay between Lennard and the house that had been his home, old Stephen Hislop would sit regarding them wistfully, and sigh for the days that were gone, as he lingered over his gill-stoup of Glenlivet, or his mug of Preston beer at the Blair Arms, or the humbler tap.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN EXCHANGE OF HEARTS.

In the happiness that awaited him after Mr. Vere's departure, Lennard's compunctions for the sudden sale of his old place were soothed, or almost forgotten. Mr. Vere had gone for a doubtful time; Traviee Cheatwood was absent, none knew precisely where, visitors who had been expected at Blairavon were sending apologies, and thus Lennard Blair and Hesbia were left entirely to themselves. Hesbia, who felt bored in the great old house, had pro-

posed to have several guests for a few weeks before returning to Liverpool. "Poor, widowed Lady Foster and her little boy Frank," of course, and some of the married officers from the nearest barrack, and their wives, whom Flora Cheyne would help her to entertain; but the issue of these invitations, even for the short period proposed, Mr. Vere had, for the first time, forbidden, hinting at the necessity of retrenchment, much to the astonishment of Hesbia, and it would have been to her intense disgust, had she not had Lennard Blair with whom to fill up her spare time.

"But retrenchment," she would repeat; "why—what on earth can papa mean?"

"He has, perhaps, a husband in view for you," said Flora Cheyne, laughing.

"A husband for me! Well, I suppose something of the kind is necessary in the end—to marry and to pay one's debts; but I can always get one without papa's aid, I hope."

Hesbia was past girlhood in experience certainly, but would a time ever come when the vague but bright dreams of that happy period—if the flirt ever had them—with all the secret thoughts and emotions inspired by love would be absorbed and interwoven with her maturer state of existence?

Some of the county ladies—"awfully county ladies," as Hesbia called them, shrugged their shoulders and lifted up their eyes in protest and astonishment at her being left alone in the great house without a matron. Hesbia had somewhere an aunt whom she might have invited; but she was at variance with the spinster in question, and would brook no control; so she was thus, and from the other contingencies alone, and for a brief period, her own mistress. The censorious resented this, and remarked—"Her only companions were the Cheynes—and they are motherless girls," added the less good-natured.

The evening of the second day after Mr. Vere had gone, saw Hesbia and Lennard seated in the beautiful little boudoir which opened off the great drawing-room at Blairavon. He had arrived to escort her to the Haughs, as she preferred walking, the evening was so fine, and the carriage would come for her after supper; and now she was attired in one of her most accurate toilettes, for with Hesbia her gloves, cuffs, skirts, and anything, even to her brass-heeled Balmorals, were each and all a careful study, that made a charming but certainly showy whole; and, as she felt assured that the frustrated meeting at the stile would be recurred to, and that the conversation might certainly take a very remarkable turn, there was something almost of nervousness imparted to her usually very nonchalant bearing.

Lennard thought he had never seen her looking so brilliant and handsome, for there was a flush on her cheek, and a coquettish smile in her bright hazel eyes; but he felt a secret emotion of intense annoyance, for, while hat in hand, awaiting her appearance in the drawing-room, he found no less than two envelopes addressed to her in the hand-writing of Sir Cullender Crowdy. They had been posted from London within a week, and lay tossed carelessly among stray cartes de visite, invitation notes, and other litter in the card-basket. What had been the contents or purport of those two letters, written within a week of each other, as the post-marks showed? and what had been her answers?

Lennard had observed that whenever he spoke warningly or slightingly—which he always did with reluctance—of this dubious personage, that she invariably evaded to reply to, or skilfully changed the subject. Well—this might be natural enough, as he was involved in several private schemes and speculations with her father. He shrunk from speaking of him now. They were setting forth considerably before the hour in which they were due by invitation at the Haughs, and Lennard had promised himself a delightful and critical interview, the memory of which might never be forgotten.

"How silent and empty the old house seems now," said he, as they issued from the conservatory door into the sunny lawn.

"But while you are at Oakwoodlee, I shall not weary so much as I should have done had you gone with papa."

"You flatter me," said he, as he lightly touched her arm, for her reply was encouraging.

"I never do so, Mr. Blair; but ennui I may feel nevertheless—one can't read novels for ever, and even Mudie's box ere long becomes a profound bore. A girl at school, I used to count the days till vacation-time; so here, I have been wont to count the days as if they were those of exile."

"Exile—Miss Vere?"

"Yes—you know I always hate the country."

"Why?"

"It bores me by its intense monotony. I am never so happy here as when I have friends with me from home—I mean, of course, from Liverpool, for then we have so many topics in common to talk of—faces and places we know; houses we mutually visit; our partners at the last ball; the last concert; who are engaged and who jilted. But when summer is past, to be left as I am just now in an evening by my dressing-room fire, with my back hair loose, listening to the broken English of Savonette, staring at the embers

while the wind sighs round that great, gloomy old house, is dreary indeed. But I crave your pardon, I quite forgot that the gloomy old house was once yours."

While she had been running on thus, Lennard had drawn her arm through his, retaining her hand for a time with a tender and lingering pressure, as he looked into her eyes, while their footsteps were bent, involuntarily as it seemed, towards a secluded part of the lawn, where a narrow pathway threaded the copsewood.

"You were at the stile, Hesbia, on that fatal evening when—when—" Lennard began.

"You suffered so fearfully?—yes; I kept our—our appointment," she replied in faint voice. "You had something particular to tell me?"

"What I had to tell you then, I search my heart in vain for fitting words to tell you now."

Lennard paused, for his emotion was deep, and never before had been a more fitting opportunity to bring matters to a crisis with Hesbia, who fully expected what she was to hear, for she leaned heavily on his arm, over which her tightly-gloved hands were clasped, while she looked up into his eyes with a half timid but wholly loving expression, and then, blushing, drooped her eyelids.

Then as doubt gave way to certainty that she loved him—loved him at last—there came a rush of rapture over every nerve and fibre of Lennard's frame—a wild careering of the blood through all his pulses, and he grew giddy with joy as he pressed her to his breast, and showered unresisted kisses on her brow, and eyes, and lips—on her hair and on her hands, while he poured into her ears the old, old story that was first whispered among the roses that bloomed in Eden. For a time they lingered in the shady wood, hand in hand, with eyes bent lovingly on eyes. In those of Hesbia there could be read a kind of expression which seemed to announce that she was overcome, conquered at last, but did not quite like to own it; after a time even that idea appeared to pass away, and love only lit them up—those beautiful, arch, and winning eyes.

Hesbia Vere had been a flirt all her life, and when flirts are really stricken with the tender passion, they are said to suffer more than quieter girls. Be that as it may, Hesbia reclined with her face on Lennard's breast, completely overcome for a time, while he, between intervals of silence—mute eloquence, indeed—uttered broken sentences expressive of the love he had ever treasured for her in his heart, and told of the comparative poverty that had fettered his tongue

that he knew her father's alleged colossal wealth, and suspected his ambitious desires and views regarding her future; but that to withstand the passion that preyed upon him was impossible; and alike was it impossible for him to leave home for a vague period, perhaps for ever, without the avowal which he now made; and much more to the same purpose said Lennard, with pauses between—pauses that were filled up very pleasantly however. Compared with his deep, full, passionate earnestness now, how strange and heartless seemed the half-bantering style he had used in times past at Liverpool, and which we can only describe as a dangler's fashion of making game when he dared not make love to Hesbia!

All that was over and gone; they seemed to know and understand each other fully now; and as they progressed through the coppice, solemn and tender vows were interchanged under the grand old trees which had heard the same love whispers from buried generations of men and women—for the summers of many centuries had seen the foliage bloom on the slopes of Blairavon—the same Blairavon that might once again be Lennard's home; for did not its mistress love him, had she not accepted his love? So he might yet die under the same roof where he had first seen the light. It was a great triumph, slowly, but successfully, and most unselfishly brought to pass! In the delight of the time, he forgot all about lands or wealth; he remembered only that he was with Hesbia, and that she loved him—loved him at last.

It was a soft evening in autumn, among the earliest of August; the rich harvest fields of West Lothian were laden with bearded grain that waved beneath the wind like the billows of a golden sea. No sound was near the loitering lovers but the voices of the birds and the rustle of the leaves, while the amber sunset poured aslant between the branches of a long forest vista, which was terminated in the distance by the picturesque little village of Blairavon, its red-tiled cottages with whitewashed walls peeping through masses of brilliant greenery, and clustering round the steep knoll that was crowned by the parish church.

Was it any wonder that hours passed on while the shadows of mountain and wood deepened and lengthened, that the last rays of sunlight faded from the highest hill top, and darkness crept upward from the low places of the landscape, and that the invitation to the Haughs was forgotten, or remembered suddenly, only to be considered a dreadful bore?

But the tumult of their thoughts had to be stilled, their

glances to be studied, and faces modelled to an air of well-bred indifference, and all their nerves to be calmed down and attuned to spend a quiet evening—after making shallow apologies of mistaking the way, or the time—in a quiet family circle, to endure the dawdling by the piano, a stupid and silent rubber at whist, or Mr. Cheyne discussing the points of his hunters, and the prospects of the grouse and blackcock shooting—while their minds were full of all that had passed in yonder greenwood shade, where the dew and darkness now lay deep on flower and tree.

Slowly passed the evening; but the butler announced "Miss Vere's carriage" in due time, and again the lovers were alone. The harvest moon was shedding a flood of yellow light over all the scenery now; the spreading oaks that bordered the way seemed in the dew as if gemmed with crystals; the great green hills towered into the blue sky in silence and distance far away; but Lennard and Hesbia took heed neither of the scenery nor of the time.

Hand in hand, and cheek to cheek, they sat whispering a renewal of their vows again and again, while the softly cushioned and well-hung carriage rolled on; and they were only roused from their delicious trance by the valet banging down the steps and opening the door—most startling and unwelcome sounds to them. Hesbia set down Lennard at the wicket in the hedge, that led to Oakwoodlee, and then he lingered in the moonlight till the last sound of her carriage wheels had died away; and she was driven home to ponder over all he had said, over all she had promised, and to convince herself that she was irrevocably in love, and engaged faithfully at last!

How intolerably lonely, dark, silent, and ghostly the old house seemed to-night; but that period would soon pass, and she knew where and when she was to meet Lennard again on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WEEK OF JOY.

"SOME one has written that 'every existence is prosaic;' but surely ours here is not so, Hesbia," said Lennard, "here in this lovely country, among those green woods, where we may wander at will, and build our airy castles fashioned out of daydreams, and made radiant within by love—the old fabrics that cost so little—and yet, at times, so much."

"Yes; if never realized!" replied Hesbia, sighing,

They were again in the autumn woods, rambling hand in hand, and talking in soft whispers of themselves and their future. It was impossible to shut their eyes to the fact that no small amount of tact and diplomacy would be requisite to undermine the influence of the baronet and others perhaps. Though such fears came as an alloy to their happiness, neither as yet gave them utterance; and they strove to dream on, and suffer themselves to glide on the current to which they had committed their fate.

Yet it was strange and sad, and terrible to think that they were communing there under the old oak trees, their faces flushed in the evening sunshine—alone in that beautiful solitude—Hesbia's tears of joy falling on Lennard's cheek as they reclined against each other lovingly, their lips meeting ever and anon, his hand pressing hers to his breast, or straying with fatuous fondness among the soft tresses of her rich brown hair, and still, for all that, they might be governed by influences beyond themselves, and a day might come when they would be nought unto each other, when they would separate and pass through life, perhaps, as strangers! This secret dread made Lennard cling more to Hesbia, and feel more anxious about the sequel of their new position.

They were engaged now; it was the joyous period of looking forward to greater and more lasting joy, yet it had that alloy already mentioned, and Lennard at times felt conscious that he might as easily make the river Avon run up a hill as win the consent of Mr. Vere; and yet with Hesbia he was as successful as the most enthusiastic lover could desire. Was it possible that there was a hidden virtue in the proprietary of the Charter Stone, after all? Laughing in his joy as he asked himself the question, it almost seemed as if its retention was a pledge from Destiny, that with Hesbia he might yet regain all his family had lost!

Though somewhat artificial by nature and education, it was difficult for Hesbia Vere to wander with Lennard Blair over the grounds that had once belonged to his family and now to hers, and without interest to listen to his voice, which was a very winning one, as he told her of the legends and superstitious memories that haunted each local feature, such as usually hover about every rock and wood, monolith and tumulus in Scotland. There were the old green mounds of the Roman camp at Kaims, where three beautiful women attired in green, with golden hair and glittering girdles, met some hunters, who, after a long day's sport in Strathbroc, the adjacent valley of Badgers, had slain a buck and were merrily preparing a supper in the woods. The fair visitors

shared their wine and venison, and spent what seemed a night in gaiety and daneing in the moonbeams; but when morning eame and they suddenly disappeared, a year and a day were found to have elapsed—a year and a day in Fairyland; the bones of the buek, bleached white and barc, lay deep among the rieh grass and the leavcs of last autumn. The doublets of the bewildered huntsmen were tattered and rotten; their boots mouldy, and their knives and arquebusses were eaeh a mass of rust; and like he of the "Sleepy Hollow" they had eaeh a long beard, while more than one stately trce that had spread its braneh es over their rustie fête, lay prostrate with age and rotting in the mountain burn.

And weird and strange were other stories that Elsie eould tell of the old silver mine in the Bathgate hills, where aneient miners—squat little men with conieal red eaps and beards that hung below their knces—worked o' nights in the aneient levels, and mintcd uneounted eoin; of kelpies who lured belated travellers, and witehes whose spells wrought evil to their enemies; of Ringy Rattles, the chain-fiend; of ghost-haunted houses; of voiees that eame from the old Dule Tree of Blairavon, and little people in green that were wont to dance in the ring that was traeeable round the Charter Stone.

On yonder hill was the ruin of a hut wherein Steinie's father had found an old woman—a reputed witeh—labouring in vain to extraet from her leg a bullet he had fired at what he coneeived to be a mountain hare flitting past him. Nor was the house of Blairavon without a ghostly tenant, for it had been said at times that the figure of a tall young man wearing the costume of George II.'s reign—the little triangular eoeked hat and powdered bobwig, the heavily-cuffed eoat and small sword—was seen, in the evening generally of the 1st of May, to linger among the trees of the avenue; but his form, which was always distinct at a distance, gradually faded out or melted away on the approaeh of the bewildered speetator. Even the railway whistle had failed to searc away this unpleasant personage, who was averred to be a Cheyne of the Haughs, who, on the occasion when Admiral Vernon took Portobello, had greatly distinguished himself there, and led a body of seamen and marines in the attack on the Iron Castle. There he slew, sword in hand, a Spanish eavalier of prodigious stature, whom previously he had thriee eneountered on the high seas, and thriee fought without avail till the muzzles of their lower deek guns were in the water. On his return, laden with Spanish doubloons, Captain Cheyne was married "to Mrs. Betty Blair, spinster, with a fortune of £10,000," as the

Caledonian Mercury records, according to the fashion of the time.

"Married; but there the alliance ended, ere it was well begun," said Lennard, when he told his story to Hesbia; "for on their wedding-day, when dinner was served up in the great dining-room, and all were making merry in the presence of the bride and bridegroom (for it was not the custom then for the newly-wedded to run off per rail to hide their blushes and their whereabouts), a servant entered and whispered to Captain Cheyne that a gentleman was awaiting him below, one who craved an audience.

"'A gentleman—at this time!' exclaimed the captain.

"'A foreigner—a seaman apparently,' the servant said; 'very tall and very dark-complexioned, wearing a peculiar dress, and having a half-healed wound in his face.'

"'Show him in, and set a chair and cover for him at the table.'

"But the servant said that the stranger declined to enter the house, and was waiting in the entrance-hall. On hearing all this, the captain changed colour visibly; and though a jovial, ranting, roaring British seaman, who took his grog always double-shotted, with two glasses instead of one, appeared sorely disconcerted; but he kissed his bride's hand, excused himself to the company, and descended to the front door, through which he was seen to pass, and thence slowly down the avenue in close and earnest, some said angry, conversation with the dark stranger, who wore a Spanish doublet and toledo of enormous length. An hour elapsed and he did not return; two hours succeeded, and his friends began to look blankly and inquiringly into each other's faces, for fears of a duel or other outrage began to suggest themselves. The bride became terrified, and her apprehensions soon developed those of the wedding guests; for evening was now at hand!

"With lighted torches, armed with swords and pistols and accompanied by dogs, they sallied forth to beat the woods and search the grounds, for at the gate-lodge the keeper affirmed that no one had passed forth from the avenue that day; but the woods were beaten and the fields were searched in vain, for of Captain Cheyne not a trace was ever found. Years rolled on, and though the bride lived to see the days of Waterloo, she never heard tidings of the handsome young husband who was so mysteriously borne away, as it was thought, by the unquiet spirit of the Spaniard whom he had slain at the storming of Portobello.

"Is it not strange Hesbia (and you will smile when I say

so), that Beltane day, as we call it, has often been an unlucky epoch for our family, and so we have never been without our fears or superstitions concerning it. On that day my grandfather sank under the wounds he had received long before at Villiers-en-Crouche ; on that day, as you know, my father died ; and on that day, my uncle Lennard was drowned in yonder loch."

"Good heavens, you are most unlucky and mysterious people," said Hesbia, laughing ; "and one must be courageous, indeed, to marry among you ! "

Even while suffering from his lameness, which was gradually passing away (after his "accident," as he named it), and though the future was involved in clouds, how rosy seemed the life of sweet intimacy he was leading now with Hesbia Vere !

"Papa has yet to be told," she would say, thoughtfully, from time to time ; and who was to take courage and do it ? Lennard or herself. Oh, it must be Lennard, of course. How she wished it all over, and that she knew the best or the worst. There would be a storm, and assuredly she dreaded it, for Hesbia, to do her justice, both loved and feared her only parent, though she knew that he was grasping and selfish to the last degree.

They had arranged all their programme for the future ; that, on returning to Liverpool, Lennard was to trust in Heaven and his own eloquence for moving her father's heart and gaining his consent ; and that, perhaps ere winter they should be married—even the day was vaguely hinted at,—on his return from South America.

Travice was still absent, and now was the favourable opportunity for searching his rooms, and obtaining, if possible, distinct trace of the crime he had committed ; and, moreover, in their moments of tender confidence, occasions were not wanting to Lennard for mentioning his strong suspicions to Hesbia ; but she looked so bright and beautiful, and they were so happy, that he was loth to cast a blight over her by wounding her self-esteem and making her blush yet more for so near a kinsman, and Feverley approved of his silence ; so the days passed on, and Lennard never told her how nearly he had died by the hand of Travice Cheatwood. He had written to Mr. Dabchick, thanking him for the information, or hint; so warily conveyed in his letter, adding that he meant to act upon it when a fitting period came ; at the same time he begged the lawyer for the sake of the Veres, to say nothing of what he suspected—a useless request perhaps, so far as the instinctively and professionally

wary little man was concerned. And so, before other events began to transpire, a whole week had slipped away—a week which we can only describe as being one of joy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PROOFS OF GUILT.

FROM their pleasant dreams they were roused to the necessity for action, when letters came from Mr. Vere.

"Dearest Lennard, our week of joy—as you name it—is fairly over now, and we must return to the realities of our former existence," said Hesbia, one evening, as he met her at the accustomed trysting place, the stile on the path to Craigellon. "By a letter I have just received from papa, it appears that my cousin Travice will arrive here to-night or to-morrow, to take me with him to Liverpool. Blairavon is to be immediately shut up, and the plate counted; the drawing-room to be given over to brown holland and lavender, to solitude and the spiders! 'Tell Mr. Blair, if you see him,' adds papa, 'that as soon as he can travel we expect to see him in the alley. Change of air, even to this place, will completely restore him.'"

Lennard was grieved, but not much startled, as he had daily expected some such summons; to Liverpool he knew they must inevitably return ere their ultimate fate was decided. It would be but the beginning of an end, and better commence it to-morrow than at a later period. He was nearly well and strong enough to accompany her; but in the society of Travice Cheatwood—even for the brief period of a railway journey—that was not to be tolerated, or even thought of.

"Cheatwood *here* again!" he muttered, while his brows became knit and his eyes sparkled, for there was no time to be lost in getting into his rooms at the manor-house, and making a search there for anything that might corroborate the suspicions caused by the hint from Mr. Dabchick.

"Again?" repeated Hesbia, looking up at him archly from under her hat and feather; "and why not again, Lennard? You are surely not jealous of poor Travice?"

"I am jealous of no one now, Hesbia," he replied, caressingly.

"You had a quarrel about cards or something, I know; but all that was made up, was it not?"

"It was pardoned, Hesbia—not forgotten; but he, to be here once more!"

"Do not be angry with my cousin," urged Hesbia, passing a hand caressingly round Lennard's arm; "the poor fellow is only his own enemy—a species of rolling stone that gathers no moss."

"And so he seems to make your father's house his home now?"

"Never when we are in Liverpool, but temporarily while we are in the country. At present, he has no other home."

"And seems incapable of making himself one, or of gaining reputable friends either."

"You are very severe, Lennard," said Hesbia, demurely; "and did I not love you very much, I should quarrel with you now——"

"Quarrel about him?"

"Yes, about anything, that I might have the pleasure of making it up again with you."

"Listen to me, Hesbia," said Lennard, taking both her hands in his—tightly and softly gloved little hands they were—and gazing into her face with a tenderness and an earnestness that were not unmixed with anger concerning the secret he had kept so long: and then, briefly and rapidly, he told her of all he had suspected; of the two silent shots; of the peculiar bullets that had been found in the body of his dog and in his own limb; of the cuff and sleeve-link he had found; together with the important information he had received by a letter—he did not immediately say from whom, nor did she inquire—that Travice Cheatwood possessed an air-gun (an illegal weapon); and that jealousy, animosity, and dread of a final exposure concerning his foul play at cards had doubtless driven him to use it.

They were, as yet, both in ignorance of how Hesbia's somewhat *outré* but enigmatical letter had been tampered with, taken from the hands of its custodian, Buttons, read, and so fully understood that it led Travice, on the night in question, to lie in secret like an assassin, waiting for Lennard; but as the latter unfolded all this web, Hesbia could only weep, amid all her indignation and shame (for the conduct of Travice inspired both), on finding that her worst suspicions—she had not been without them—were now confirmed and realized!

"And this weapon—the air-gun—is, you say, in his room?"

"Is or was. Certainly, Mr. Dabchick saw it there," replied Lennard, a little doggedly.

"Oh," said Hesbia, with something of disdain, "*he* was your informant?"

"Why should I conceal it?—yes."

"Come home with me; we shall summon the housekeeper and make a search."

"Thanks, Hesbia—you speak my very wishes; but I fear our scrutiny may be in vain; your cousin would surely not be such a simple blockhead as to leave openly, or lying about, the means of committing a crime, which filled all the county with wonder, and excited such a spirit of inquiry."

"Come with me at all events—come with me this instant, and we shall see!" she exclaimed passionately, as she passed her handkerchief over her eyes, which sparkled through their tears, while her cheek flushed with excitement; "what will papa say, or think, or do, when he learns that you have suffered all this at our hands—at the hands of one of our family, and suffered it in silence too!"

"It was for your sake, dearest Hesbia."

"My darling Lennard—my dear, good, amiable pet—I shall love you more than ever!"

"But do not distress yourself—all is over now, and I am well again, though I could not exactly vault over a five-barred gate yet; but the good time, even for that, is coming."

"And now to examine Travice's rooms," resumed Hesbia, who in her eagerness almost ran till they reached the door of Blairavon House, where the servants, under the direction of the solemn and pompous butler and the bustling housekeeper, were carefully closing and securing windows and shutters, taking up carpets and down curtains and hangings, reversing pictures and shrouding statues, glass shades, and so forth, in linen covers, so that already the great drawing-room, when doubly reflected in its opposite mirrors, seemed a long and silent perspective of ghostly grotesqueries.

Summoning the housekeeper, Hesbia desired to "conduct Mr. Blair to Mr. Cheatwood's rooms, as there was a gun—no, a pipe—a book, or something there which he wished to obtain before they were finally shut up;" and while the domestic curtseyed and withdrew with Lennard, Hesbia threw aside her hat and gloves, and resolving to make a most accurate search the moment he was gone, seated herself on a sofa in the dismantled drawing-room, and threw open a window, that the evening breeze might cool her flushed cheek, for the aroma of the lavender branches strewn about so plentifully by the housekeeper, was somewhat oppressive. Her mind was full of exciting thoughts—of grief, of shame, and bitter indignation against Travice, who had so nearly brought scandal upon her and her father; and these sentiments were not unmixed with a hope that this outrage, if privately proved and brought home to the perpe-

trator, might be successfully used as a lever power, when Lennard urged their suit, and sought a consent to their marriage. All was still in the great mansion; she could hear only the beating of her heart and the buzz of the flies in the vast space of the stately room; and without, in the calm evening, all was intensely quiet. No sound broke the stillness but the cawing of the sable rooks in the autumn woods, and the distant clatter of a long train of carts, passing from the mains of Kaims, heavily laden with what she was wont to call her "papa's black diamonds." She was restless; she looked at her watch; ten minutes had elapsed, and Lennard had not rejoined her; what had he found—what was he about—and why had she not gone too? Her curiosity became too great for endurance, so she hastened towards the rooms which she knew had been assigned to her cousin, traversing a long and antique corridor, through the deeply-embayed windows of which the sunlight fell in flakes of golden light, while on the lozenged panes the leaves of the clustering ivy, and those of the loftier trees, were rustling with a sound that was dreary enough when heard in the nights of winter.

Lennard had not yet left the quarters of his late rival, for now that he was in them he felt all the awkwardness of his position as a stranger, and the impossibility of fulfilling the object of his visit, as he dared not break open lockfast places, and yet where else would that probably be for which he was seeking? So he followed the housekeeper with vague but restless eyes, as she showed him through Mr. Cheatwood's bed-chamber, dressing-room, and bath-closet. How well Lennard remembered the first, for when in infancy it had been his nursery, and there had he often nestled and cowered in his little crib at night, when the winter blasts rumbled in the great hollow chimneys, and when the hail and ivy leaves clattered on the corridor windows, while he feared the spectres that filled the stories of the servants and the peasantry. Captain Cheyne, perhaps, returning from Elfland in his red coat and bob-wig, or Ringy Rattles, the Chain-fiend, whose red-hot links swooping through the air could overtake and enfold even the swiftest horseman; or the kelpie who lured Uncle Lennard into the loch, and many other desperate hobgoblins unknown to those who live in an atmosphere of gas. Though altered and modernized, it was the same room in many respects, and the massive stone fire-place, with its Scoto-Italian mouldings, was quite unchanged. Its adjuncts and appurtenances were more luxurious and splendid than tasteful or elegant; but pipes of all sorts and sizes, *cartes-de*

visite of opera-dancers, old cards, racing calendars, odd numbers of *Punch*, *Bell's Life*, and so forth, littered the mantelpiece and console, while brilliant French crayon heads of somewhat languid and dishevelled beauties were hung on the walls in slender maplewood frames.

"Now, sir, do you see what you want, please—a book or pipe I think Miss Vere said?" urged the housekeeper, who grew somewhat perplexed by the dreamy air of Lennard: he had entirely forgot her presence, and now that he was actually in the apartments of Travice Cheatwood, continued to survey with a bewildered and irresolute eye the suite of Elizabethan furniture, the elaborate bed with its stately canopy and hangings of coral-coloured damask, the handsome dwarf and French wardrobes with mirror panels, the cheval glasses which had so often reflected the accurate and fashionable toilettes of the absent desperado, the writing-table—a miracle of carving—and his luxurious easy-chair; but where the deuce was he to look for the air-gun?

Not in the chest of drawers or wardrobes, most of which were locked, and which he had no right (though the best of excuses) for opening; and no such implement or weapon was to be seen among the rods, sticks, billiard-cues, umbrellas, and hunting-whips which littered a corner of the bath-closet.

"I see nothing like that which Dabchick has mentioned in his letter," said he to Hesbia, who now joined them.

"I hope to Heaven he may have been mistaken," said she. "He had his own reasons for disliking Travice, apart from the card squabble."

And in her anxiety, quite forgetting how much her speech conveyed to Lennard, and that the "reasons" referred to must have been jealousy of Travice when he first came to Blairavon, she proceeded with great energy to pull out and push in several of the drawers which were left unlocked. Some were empty, others contained some articles of clothing only; but she was nervous, excited; and after tossing them vaguely about, began to survey the apartments with a sharper scrutiny than Lennard.

"When or how was this injury done; and so clumsily repaired too?" she asked, pointing to a portion of the wainscot skirting of the dressing-closet, which had evidently been roughly removed and replaced, and to conceal which the window-hangings had been disposed so awkwardly that her foot caught them.

The housekeeper shook her head; she had never observed the damage before; but a moulded piece of the wainscot,

some four feet in length, had evidently been forced off and restored in a very unworkman-like manner; and now, all unused to excitement, very much was that portly dame astonished (and such a story it would be to relate in the servants' hall!) when she saw Mr. Lennard Blair make a dash at the wood with the poker, and, after wrenching it off, utter a cry of fierce satisfaction! For there, concealed by the floor-skirting of the room, he found the identical object of his search—a double-barrelled iron tube, the air-gun, with a package of its bullets marked AA on the back of each, conical in form, plugged with wood and precisely like the two in his pocket-book, which we may add exactly suited the bore of the inner barrel. And that more complete evidence might not be wanting, there too lay the cuff of fine linen edged with dark needle-work, and having two Indian gold coins as a link, exactly corresponding with those found by Lennard with the frayed fragment in the hedge. In fact Travice, on discovering that he had lost one on that eventful night, had been wary enough to conceal the other with the instrument of his crime, in the very place where—thanks to the sharpness of Hesbia's eye—Lennard found them now! Being ignorant of all this cause for excitement, the housekeeper's usually stolid visage seemed to expand and grow round with wonder.

"Most fatal proofs! most fatal proofs!" exclaimed Hesbia, clasping her hands.

"So, so—you see now that 'the trail of the serpent' is complete!"

"Oh, how you have suffered at his hands, my poor, dear Lennard!" said Hesbia, forgetting the housekeeper, whose eyes opened very wide indeed; "how shall we ever convince my poor deluded papa of the extreme guilt of which his nephew is capable?"

"Were the scoundrel here, face to face with me,"—Lennard was beginning furiously, when—

"Hollo; what's up!—by Jove!" exclaimed a voice close by, and they found themselves confronted by Travice Cheatwood, whom an imprecation escaped, sworn bitterly and huskily through his clenched teeth.

At his back stood Mademoiselle Savonette, whom a laudable curiosity had drawn hither, her dark French eyes glittering with gratified malice, for she especially disliked him, and seemed to take in the whole situation. He was looking very pale, and his attire was in disorder; he was minus hat and gloves; his cravat and collar were torn and awry, and his whole appearance bore the strongest traces of his having

been engaged in a recent scuffle. Yet though a strange expression of spite and rage mingled with that of terror in his sallow face rendering his green eyes almost white, he mustered courage to say, "What is the meaning of all this, Hesbia; and why the devil do I find this fellow in my room, and knocking my traps about—eh?"

Hesbia surveyed him with a very mingled expression of face; but shame was more predominant there than pity. He was again about to bluster, but the moment his eye fell upon the weapon which was in the hand of Lennard, who had kept it partly concealed, lest there might be an attempt to wrest it from him, a deadlier paleness spread over his face, and he reeled against the wall like a drunken man.

Notwithstanding all his constitutional insolence, there was not, perhaps, within the three seas of Britain, a more complete moral coward than Travice Cheatwood! On this occasion his aspect was pitiable, and it so happened that he had greater and more immediate cause for terror than even the present discovery and probable vengeance of Lennard Blair.

"Treacherous and malevolent scoundrel!" exclaimed the latter in a low voice of concentrated passion, while his eyes, dark, honest, and indignant, seemed to glare into those of Cheatwood—literally flashing death and terror into his soul: "thank your cousin that her presence alone prevents me from beating you to the earth with this, your own infamous weapon; and thank her further, that for her sake alone, I do not send you to pick oakum for life, by handing you over, as you deserve, to the nearest police magistrate!"

Then he added in a hurried whisper to Hesbia—"After this complete discovery, I cannot trust myself in his presence longer, lest some terrible scene ensue,—thus you must permit me to withdraw. I shall leave my card here to-morrow," said he to the housekeeper—in short he scarcely knew what to say—"and if I can be of any service in this hurry and confusion, command me. If you, my good woman, are ever called upon to state on oath the discovery of this evening, it is to be hoped that you will remember all the details!"

"Lor, sir; yes, sir," replied the poor woman, looking utterly and miserably mystified.

Then, gently touching the hand of Hesbia and whispering "To-morrow at the stile," he left the house, carrying with him all the proofs of the guilt of Cheatwood, who never made the least attempt to recover his property.

But there was no meeting at the stile on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JUDEN GRABBIE'S VISITOR.

BEFORE explaining the reason of Mr. Cheatwood's remarkable appearance on this occasion, we must change the scene to the office of a certain local official already mentioned incidentally in a preceding chapter, Mr. Juden Grabbie. It stood in the pretty village of Blairavon, the white-walled cottages of which, with fluted or overlapping red tiles, and crow-stepped gables tufted with green moss, and having brilliant trailers round their windows, clustered about the grassy knoll on which the church is situated.

Diverging from this, the older portion of the hamlet, there had sprung up in the direction of the coal-pits a new street of plain little cottages, built of hewn stone, blue slated, and having square windows with iron frames (all lozenge-fashioned and of dreary uniformity). This little street had a bleak, hard, bare, and somewhat grimy aspect by day; and the dark figures of the colliers, like pantomimic gnomes with lamps flickering in their caps, when passing to and from the pits, lent a gloomy air to the place, even when the sun was shining, and there groups of noisy children contended in the gutters with dogs and ducks and hens. But on the night preceding the *dénouement* which closes the last chapter, flakes of warm light from the gas-lit windows streaming athwart the thoroughfare made the collier dwellings look bright and cheery.

These cottages bordered the path to the Kaims, where at intervals ruddy gleams shot upon the sky of night with a strange and weird effect, bringing out of the darkness fantastic-like erections, revolving wheels, ropes, chains, and the figures of grimy men. That path had been in former days the paved Roman way to the camp of Agricola, and in more recent times the old mail-coach road. It had long ceased to be used, all traffic being transferred to the railway; so it became more rugged, more encroached upon by hedges, wild brambles, and trees, and by borders of grass that grew rank and deep, than it had ever been, even in the days of old, when Mary fled from the field of Langside, or when her father, the fifth James, rode to the Jousting Haugh of Linlithgow, in time to see the battle between the Hamiltons and Douglasses, when culverins boomed in the hollow glen, and axes flashed on casques of steel, and when Lennox, "the best and bravest man in Scotland," perished be-

neath the sword of the High Inquisitor; for it is an old, old road-way, and has seen generations of strange wayfarers in its time. At the junction of the old village with the new, as a species of connecting-link, stood the office and dwelling of Mr. Grabbie, a small but snug cottage, with a little garden-plot before it.

Mr. Juden Grabbie was a personage who exercised, but in the matter of advice only, the distinguished functions of a country-writer (*Anglicè* attorney) and messenger-at-arms, and who not unfrequently stooped to do the humble work usually assigned to criminal officers. He was a cunning, servile, greedy (and outwardly most religious) wretch, who, under the pretence of local agency, had contrived to get a great many of the title-deeds and other documents of the district into his dingy hands. He occasionally "did" little accommodations, too, at "a mild forty per cent.;" he was a source of intense dread to the poor and needy, and to all who were in his power, and who had no desire to contemplate the charms of Scottish scenery through the iron grilles of the nearest Tolbooth.

In his office, the walls of which were somewhat ostentatiously hung with insurance advertisements and prospectuses, roups of turnips, and green, white, and live stock, all yellow and fly-blown, intrenched deep among bundles and dôquets of papers and letters, surrounded by well-thumbed ledgers and green tin boxes, piled on an iron frame, Mr. Grabbie, in a well-worn suit, on this evening was seated at his writing-table, working intently by the light of a green-shaded gas jet, when his slipshod servant-girl came timidly in and placed before him a square glazed card, whereon was the superscription of "*Mr. Nab, Liverpool.*"

"Nab—Nab—is it no MacNab? Never heard of such a name—what is he like, lassie?" he asked, glaring sharply at her through his spectacles, while pausing with one finger on a column of figures, and his pen held over the ink-horn.

The girl hesitated and seemed doubtful, so, after rubbing his grey grisly chin, Mr. Grabbie desired her to show the visitor in. Then he made a marginal mark in pencil, so that no time might be lost in resuming his summation again, wiped his spectacles with a dingy brown handkerchief, and readjusted himself in his chair, so that he could sit in perfect shadow, while the visitor would be exposed to the glare of the gas jet; and all this he did rapidly by system as well as habit.

The stranger, a pleasant-looking little man, about forty years of age, with an intensely keen eye, and an appearance

that was almost gentlemanly, was carefully dressed in black; he entered quietly, bowing and smiling, and placed his umbrella, hat, and grey cotton gloves upon a chair.

"Good morning, Mr. Grabbie," said he.

"Morning—good evening would be nearer the time o' day, I think," growled Grabbie, suspiciously; "be seated, sir."

"Thank you; I am a stranger in these here parts—just come by the Carlisle train, and have been specially recommended to you, sir."

Mr. Grabbie now gave one of his brief nods; the stranger had certainly come about a money matter—perhaps a summons against some one.

"You know this county well, of course, sir?"

"The county!" said Grabbie; "I should think so; I was born and bred in this village—was never out of it, except for a few years' drudgery in the office of Snap and Grinder, the writers in Glasgow. Well?"

"You know Blairavon House?"

"Perfectly—Mr. Vere's place now."

"Perhaps you may have seen a Mr. Travice Cheatwood there or hereabout?"

Mr. Grabbie, from being blunt and almost indifferent in manner, now became suddenly interested.

"I have never seen him there, but I have seen him once too often *here*."

"In this office?"

"Seated in the very chair you occupy; but," added Grabbie, closing his teeth with a snap, "he is not in this neighbourhood just now."

"He soon will be."

"Ah—you know that, and wish to see him?"

"Very particular," replied the little man, winking and smiling pleasantly.

"May I inquire *what* you are?" asked Grabbie, sharply, after a pause.

"You may, sir; I'm Mr. Nathan Nab, of the Liverpool detective police."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Grabbie, lying back in his chair, and raising his spectacles to his brow, while a smile of malicious satisfaction spread over his face, puckering up his cunning and sunken eyes, and then these two men surveyed each other for a moment in silence.

No person would for a moment have supposed that Mr. Juden Grabbie was or ever had been a gentleman. In his sixtieth year now, his appearance was vulgar, yet tolerably

respectable. Mean in visage, he had a cruel mouth, shaggy brows, and keen eyes, with a kind of red malevolent spark in them. Cunning, as we have said, he was deep, cautious, heartless, and brutal at times, especially to the helpless and poor; yet he was always scared, restless, and nervous in the presence of his superiors, and being quite aware of this defect in his temperament, he strove to conceal it by an assumed frankness and cordiality of manner, that made such men as Ranald Cheyne and Richard Blair draw themselves up to their full height, and silence him by a steady stare, which excited his secret hate; but over the last-named unfortunate Grabbie had revelled in triumph and revenge, when he had him seated in that same office, perspiring with vexation at the ruinous renewal of bills, granted at nearly fifty per cent., by *him*—Juden Grabbie—the earth-stopper's son!

Now Mr. Grabbie, among his other characteristics, was a good hater; and most cordially did he hate Travice Cheatwood, whom he had "accommodated," and by whom he had been more than once insulted. "The man who has a purpose to achieve, or a secret to hide, should never make an enemy;" but Travice had a purpose to achieve, and more than one ugly secret to hide; and yet he had made an enemy of Mr. Grabbie, for that personage, when venturing to Blairavon on one occasion, sent up his card by Mademoiselle Savonette, Maxwell and Buttons having both eschewed his request, and while waiting in the hall, had heard Travice say, impatiently,—

"A person wanting to see me, you say?"

"Oui, m'sieur—M'sieur Grabbie from the village."

"Then give *this* to M'sieur Grabbie from the village, and tell him to go to the devil, Savonette, translating it into French or Scotch as you please!"

And the soubrette brought back to Grabbie his card—torn in two! Grabbie could barely pocket the affront; but his fury knew no bounds when he discovered that Mr. Cheatwood had that night, without leaving any address behind him, taken the train for Carstairs Junction, where all trace of him was lost.

"You belong to the Liverpool detective force?" said Mr. Grabbie, with a wicked but gratified smile.

"Yes," replied the other, proceeding to light a cheroot. "No objection to this sort of thing, I hope?"

"None. And your business is with Mr. Vere's nephew?"

"Yes; it's a queer bit of work, but common enough with our profession. It is simply concerning a bill for £1,400—a forgery."

"On whom?"

"Mr. Vere."

"To that amount?"

"£1,000 over the original sum."

"And by Mr. Cheatwood? Odds, man! I think that a wealthy gentleman like Mr. Vere might have taken it up and said nothing about it for the sake of his sister's son."

"So perhaps he would had he known; but naturally enough he denied all knowledge of it, and telegraphed to Mr. Envoyse that it was a forgery. By this time it had been duly honoured by a bank, and the affair was before the police ere the number and date remaining in his cheque-book showed Mr. Vere that it was one originally for four hundred given to his hopeful nephew. It has been paid away to other folks, and now I am here with a warrant for his arrest and conveyance to England."

Mr. Grabbie rubbed his rough chin and coarse hands with intense satisfaction.

"I have never been in Scotland before, sir; and the way of doing dooty here is strange to me. Your name was mentioned to me by the head of our force in Liverpool, as having been already in correspondence with him concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Cheatwood."

"Anent a protested two hundred pound bill of my own—yes."

"And so having a direct personal interest in his capture."

"Troth have I! But I don't see how his capture for forgery will bring me much nearer payment."

One hundred and twenty was the sum given to Travice on his own acceptance for *two* hundred, and it proved to be almost the only rash transaction of Mr. Grabbie's long professional career. In the end he had trusted to Mr. Vere taking it up to prevent exposure; but that gentleman had found other affairs of greater magnitude to occupy him, and never replied to his letters.

"So the bill has been paid away?"

"Yes; from 'and to 'and till it's reached them as won't be trifled with. Mr. Vere has been driven rather wild by the pranks of that same nephew, and he is—if all folks *do* say now in Liverpool—perhaps not quite so rich as he seems."

"Do you really say so?" exclaimed Grabbie, as his eyes sparkled with a pleasure he could not perhaps have explained. "Why, he bought a bit more land here lately—Oakwoodlee; and these pits of his are one of the best-paying specs in the West country."

"Well, he has had many losses of late. I have walked over all his place since I came by the afternoon train; and I learned by inquiry at the house, that Mr. Travice Cheatwood is absent, but expected to-morrow, or the next day at latest; and so I shall be on the watch to grab him!"

Grabbie ground his teeth with evident satisfaction at this new prospect of vengeance for his loss, adding, "You will not require the aid of the Rurals unless necessary?"

"Oh, no; gents never resist. I'll just slip the bracelets on and have him off to Liverpool, second class, by the night train. I wish the thing done quietly. Mr. Vere is a gent that will come down 'andsome if I does it 'andsome and awoids exposure."

"You have the warrant all right, I suppose?" said Grabbie with a keen glance at the dapper little detective.

"That is what I especially wished to ask you about, for I was dispatched in a precious hurry, I can tell you; but here it is, all regular."

"And isn't worth so much waste paper," exclaimed Grabbie, the moment he cast his keen fierce eyes over it.

Mr. Nab looked aghast, but incredulous.

"An English warrant in Scotland is as useless as a Roosian one, and, even if signed by the Lord Chancellor, must be *indorsed* by the sheriff of the county or stewartry in which the person who is to be arrested resides. Why, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Nab," suggested the little man mildly.

"Mr. Nab, you must be very new in your business not to know this. A warrant signed by the Lord Advocate empowers the arrest of any one in any part of the kingdom of Scotland. But that is never asked for in such petty cases as this. The sheriff's signature is necessary, and if resistance is apprehended——"

"Lor, what do you do in *that* case?" asked Mr. Nab, who had vague ideas of Scottish mountain passes bristling with swords and pistols; for he had seen "Rob Roy" at the Alexandra Theatre, and the total rout of the British troops amid much blank cartridge and blue fire.

"Well, in *that* case, the presence of a Scottish criminal officer is necessary, and I can act in that capacity."

"But what the dooce is the meaning of all this fuss about a Scotch sheriff's signature?" asked Mr. Nab, with some irritation of manner.

"Do you no ken, sir," asked Grabbie, with a small burst of patriotism that was perhaps professional—he was not so degraded as to be without that—for though a legal shark he was not a legal snob like Mr. Dabchick—"Do you no ken,

sir, that by the Act of Union passed in the reign of Queen Anne, no Scottish subject, or person resident in Scotland, can be taken forth the kingdom by a warrant from any authority hailing from the region of Westminster; for Clause 19th saith, that 'no causes in Scotland shall be cognisable by the Courts of Chancery, Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, or any other court in Westminster Hall;' and to further ensure such protection, the sheriff's signature is now necessary for legality."

Mr. Nab listened to all this with some bewilderment, as he now heard, perhaps for the first time, of a Treaty of Union and a queen called Anne. He had, however, been recommended to the right quarter by the head of his department in this instance; for in the promptings of his rage against Travice Cheatwood, Mr. Grabbic gladly promised to make all sure and certain. Before the afternoon of the next day he had the English warrant completed, and watch set at the two railway stations eastward and westward of Blairavon; and the first shadows of sunset saw him and his English compatriot, after a comfortable dinner at the Blair Arms, loitering near the front lodge-gate of the mansion-house, and smoking a couple of exceedingly bad cigars with great apparent satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OLD QUARRY.

As the time of Mr. Cheatwood's arrival at the manor-house on this occasion was unknown, no smart tiger, topbooted with cockade and belt, no handsome Tilbury and high-stepping horse with splendid harness, awaited him at the solitary little railway station; and all unaware of the plans laid for his capture, and of the discovery and complete disgrace that so surely awaited him, he had sped along the Edinburgh and Glasgow line by the afternoon express train, till he reached the branch of single rails for Blairavon. He was not in the sweetest mood of mind with fortune. He had hung about his new cavalry friends until they had become perplexed by the run of luck at cards and billiards being perpetually in *his* favour; so his mode of play was watched, and being found unsatisfactory, he was one wet night collared by a file of the main-guard, and trundled without much ceremony outside the barrack gate, where he found himself in evening press and glazed boots under a torrent of rain.

Following at some distance the porter who was carrying

his portmanteau and rugs, Travice walked leisurely along with a cigar in his mouth, and no more formidable weapon in his hand than the most slender of umbrellas. The beauty of the evening, the great green hills, towering into the blue sky, their peaks yet reddened by the last farewell light of the sun that had set; the soft russet and brown that were stealing over the autumn woods, the golden grain that stretched far away till lost in evening haze; the silvery smoke ascending from cottage roofs into the dewy air, and the voices of the cattle, as "the lowing herd wound slowly o'er the lea," had all no charm for Travice, though he paused at times in reverie, with his cigar between his daintily-gloved fingers, and then muttering an imprecation, would tread slowly and sulkily on, immersed in his own troublesome thoughts. But at a part of the path he was pursuing —between two cornfields and not far from an old quarry, he suddenly found himself confronted by two men, in one of whom he recognized Mr. Grabbie, and in the other he felt instinctively the presence of a foe, though he was a well-dressed, smiling, and dapper little man.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Cheatwood," said he, "but we have a small piece of business with you."

"With me, fellows!" said Travice, instantly on his guard.

"Yes," replied Grabbie, with a growl of rage, while his companion fumbled in his coat-pocket for a pair of handcuffs; "I hold a protested bill of yours."

"Oh, bother your bill just now, Grabbie—I'll make it all square in a day or two. I give you my honour——"

"Sorry, sir, to deprive you of so valuable a commodity," said Mr. Nab (not one of whose motions escaped the eyes of Travice), smiling more pleasantly than ever, as he dropped his umbrella, and suddenly producing a pair of handcuffs (bright and well worn, evidently), he added, "I have a warrant for your arrest," and made a clutch at the wrists of Travice, who, ever on his guard, had warily sprung back two or three paces, and stood prepared to show fight.

"My dear sir," said Mr. Nab, with a pleasant and even friendly air of expostulation, though he felt that he was managing matters with less professional skill than usual; "it is a mere waste of time to resist!"

But Travice did not see it in that light. Knowing something of the science of self-defence, and being pretty strong and active, notwithstanding his dissipated habits, he was resolved not to be taken without a desperate struggle; but his cheek grew pale, his eyes glared with a strange and fishy expression, and his fair moustache and upper lip quivered with the agitation he could not control.

Those who are living in a tangle of falschoods never know when or where the danger of discovery lies; so it was with Cheatwood! His network of treachery and deceit had been gradually growing tighter around him, and he knew that a crisis, a climax, must come at last; yet there glowed within him a spirit of defiant desperation, not unmixed with terror. Could his secret shot at Lennard Blair have come to light? Was it the "doctored bill?" thought he, or what the devil was it? Any way, he was resolved not to be arrested as a felon without a struggle for liberty.

"At whose instance is your warrant?" he asked.

"The police magistrates of Liverpool."

"On what charge?" he asked, in a husky voice; "but stand back, I say, on your peril!"

"Forgery!"

The word fell horribly on his ear! Often had he named it to himself; but now when uttered to his face in open daylight, it filled him with dismay. For a moment he presented a pitiable spectacle; that of a human being degraded by his own acts—hunted, detected, and brought to bay at last; pale, shrinking, fierce, and desperate, without friends, or hope of refuge. But the next instant saw his constitutional assurance come to his aid, and on Mr. Nab preparing, cat-like, to make a spring, he exclaimed, furiously—"Be off, you mangy scoundrels, if you would reach your kennel with a skinful of whole bones."

"You cannot be so mad as to attempt resistance!" said Mr. Nab, who seemed more amused than surprised, while the bullying Grabbie grew savage, and proceeded to turn up the cuffs of his coat.

"You can't arrest me here on English warrant. I know *that* much of law."

"But it is duly signed by the sheriff, and its legality shall be enforced, sir—enforced!" cried Grabbie; "surrender peaceably in the name of the Queen, you dyvour loon, for if you dare but to strike one blow—"

What the threat of Grabbie was to have been Travice never knew, for observing that the speaker in his wrath and excitement had drawn unusually close to the edge of the quarry, he made a sudden rush, and dealing him a blow (a regular facer) fairly between the eyes, and well planted in too, he shot the legal bully of the village clean over the brink, and with a half-stifled yell Grabbie fell headlong crashing among prickly whin bushes, gorse, and loose stones to the bottom, some thirty feet or more below.

Despair gave Travice pluck, and closing instantly and

recklessly upon Mr. Nathan Nab, he strove to lift him off his feet and send him after his companion. Nab fought desperately, and with all the more energy that he felt himself armed with all the majesty and authority of the law; but in a second he found Travice too much for him, and felt his ribs compressed, himself half lifted bodily from the ground, and hurried toward the brink of the rocks, over which he was deliberately flung on the top of Grabbie; and then, with the hot perspiration pouring in bead-drops over his temples, the old wild clamorous anxiety and terror in his heart—the same revulsion of spirit—which he felt on that night when he shot at Lennard Blair, Cheatwood rushed back through the fields towards the railway, in the hope of being soon able to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the scene of this new and most unexpected catastrophe.

He knew the depth of the quarry. It was old, long unused, and water generally lay there. So his hope was that if they were not suffocated in the slimy puddle, these legal wolves might escape with a few broken bones; any way they must not look upon his face again, for he had committed a fresh—and he knew not how serious—violation of the law. Onward he ran through the fields and under the shadow of the hedgerows. He was but two miles from the station, and could he but reach Glasgow, there all trace of him would be lost, and there were ships in plenty for America and everywhere else. But a cry, a malediction escaped him on discovering that he had not a farthing in his purse; his last shilling he had given to the porter who was carrying his portmanteau! Hesbia would replenish his exchequer, he had no doubt; then to her he would apply. There was yet time to reach the house, to restore his attire to order, to explain the desperation of his affairs, obtain money from her or the butler, and get away by the first night train, before Messrs. Nab and Grabbie had scrambled out of the quarry-hole, if they were able to do so, and could rouse the rural police and others on his track.

"If," thought he, "they have but one broken bone each, I am safe!"

He lost no time in putting his plan in execution, and, seeking the nearest and most unfrequented paths to the house, reached it, as we have seen, just in time to be confronted by Hesbia and Lennard, with the proofs of another crime in their hands. To seek his friend Feverley's cottage and relate what had taken place, had been Lennard's sole idea on leaving the manor-house. He had no intention of appealing to authorities or of demanding publicly the expo-

sure and punishment of Cheatwood, even for all he had made him suffer, for much of the shame and obloquy of a criminal prosecution would recoil on the Veres, and from such an event he shrunk. Confirmation of his suspicions, and a true key to the cousin's secret character, were all that he required. If love for Hesbia did not make him magnanimous in his secret thoughts towards Travice, it at least made him politic but there was a storm of fiery indignation rankling in his heart as he walked slowly down the avenue in the twilight, and crossing the highway sought the shortest by-path that led through the fields to the village.

A few drops of rain plashing on the still leaves gave warning of a coming shower; it came in time, and fell so heavily that he was compelled, for more than half an hour, to seek the shelter of a thicket. While there he heard in his vicinity strange sounds, which after a time he became certain were the moans and cries of some one in pain; and these, on examination, he found to proceed from a man lying at the bottom of the old quarry near the pathway.

Lennard knew well every nook, crevice, and shelf of the quarry; on many a day in boyhood he had birdnested among the gorse that fringed its mouth, or fished for minnows and "pow-wowets" with a luggie and string in the slimy pool at the bottom; so now safely but carefully he made his way downward in the gloom, to find the sufferer, who lay helplessly on his back, so severely shaken and bruised as to be almost unable either to walk or stand. He proved to be Mr. Nab, whose companion, having suffered less injury, had clambered out and gone to the village intent alike on succour and pursuit.

"'Elp me, for Godsake, whoever you are, out of this 'orrible 'ole!" cried poor Mr. Nab in a piteous voice.

"How the deuce came you here—any bones broken?" asked Lennard, stooping over him, kindly.

"I can't tell—I fear so—I feel smashed a'most, from 'eel to 'ead—oh dearie me!" groaned the other.

"Get up, if you can, please—try to stand, and I shall help you out. I know every part of this place, as well as if I had dug it."

He had almost said "owned it," but failed, for such had once been the case. Half supporting and half dragging the little man, who every second implored him to stop (and who, between the combined effects of the slimy puddle, the recent rain, the blood which had flowed from some cuts and scratches, with his bruises and fears, was in a deplorable condition), Lennard had nearly reached the mouth or summit

of the quarry, when he heard voices and saw the flickering light of a couple of stable lanterns, as Mr. Grabbie arrived in all haste, with the efficient aid of two rural policemen, big burly fellows with gilt St. Andrew crosses on their felt helmets, a brace of grooms from the inn, and several colliers from the village, all of whom immediately recognized "young Mr. Blair," and uttered his name in various cadences of astonishment.

"Glad to see you able to exert yourself so well, sir, after your strange accident," said Juden Grabbie, whose head was bound up by a handkerchief. "This is a dangerous hole for one to venture into in the dark."

"I never thought of the danger when some one required help or pity, Mr. Grabbie."

"And it was like ane o' the gude auld stock to fear neither deil nor darkness!" said one of the policemen, touching his cap to Lennard; "mony a day lang syne, when bairns, hae you and I shot rabbits and fuimarts here in this auld quarryhole."

"How came all this about, Mr. Grabbie?" asked Lennard. "Did your friend—he looks very pale—fall into the quarry?"

"No, Mr. Blair," replied Grabbie, grinding his teeth with pain and rage; "but both he and I were knocked into it like a pair of ninepins when in the lawful execution of our duty! What think you of that, sir?"

"Knocked into it! by whom?"

"I am ashamed to say by one man—that unhanged villain, Travice Cheatwood."

"You use strong language, Mr. Grabbie."

"Not stronger than the occasion deserves."

"Do you forget that he is the nephew of Mr. Vere?"

"That matters little; and no action at law for speaking unadvisedly of him will ever follow, we may be sure of that!" continued Grabbie, with a dogged insolence of tone.

"You had a scuffle; so that accounts for the disorder of his attire when he reached his uncle's house."

"*He is there, then!*" cried Grabbie, in a hoarse voice, with a start of anger and satisfaction.

Lennard hesitated.

"Speak, sir—evasion is quite useless."

"I certainly left him there half an hour ago; there is little reason why I should cloke or conceal his movements."

"Give me your warrant, Mr. Nab, and the bracelets too! Lads," exclaimed Grabbie, with angry triumph to the police and other men from the village, "you'll follow me. Mr. Blair will attend to Mr. Nab—he is too kind-hearted and brave to leave him."

"I beg that you fellows will not make a row in the mansion, and alarm Miss Vere. She is alone, or with servants only," urged Lennard, angrily.

"We shall do nothing unseemly, be assured, sir," replied Grabbie; "but we must surround the house and capture Mr. Cheatwood, or Cheat-the-wuddie; by my soul he is well named!"

And Grabbie grinned in savage glee at his own pun.

"On what charge do you arrest him—assault?"

"Yes, and worse—fraud and forgery."

"Good heavens! the amount?"

"He received a bill of exchange or cheque for £400 and paid it away for £1,400—clever dodge; but soon detected."

Lennard felt his breath taken away; this must be the very document about which there had been so much correspondence and telegraphing between Mr. Vere and old Mr. Envoyse. But ere he could ask another question Grabbie and his followers, all full of natural excitement and vulgar curiosity, had departed to surround the manor-house, while Lennard felt his arm clutched nervously by Mr. Nab, who groaned heavily.

"Don't leave me, please sir, till I'm in a safe place. I've a wife and little 'uns in Liverpool—my poor missus, bless her 'art; she knows nothing of my most miserable plight to-night." He seemed on the point of weeping; but changing his tone to anger, he added with something of Bailie Jarvie's emotion, "It was in the hexecution of the lawr; but I wishes as my old boots 'ad been red 'ot, when I came on such a herrand into this cussed houtlandish country. However, dooty, you know, sir, is dooty."

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUNTED.

TRAVICE CHEATWOOD felt that the worst was known now. Cowering for a moment under the bright and scornful eyes of his cousin, whose slender nostrils and upper lip seemed to quiver with mingled shame and passion, he was convinced that this was an extremely awkward time to ask her for money; so he delayed for a little, being unluckily ignorant how closely the reinforced beagles of the law were on his track. Lennard Blair was gone—that was one relief; and the wondering servants, whom the too evident disorder of his bearing and attire had filled with all the curiosity of

their class, had retired with lingering steps and listening ears, and at last the cousins were left together face to face in the dining-room, where the gas had just been lighted, and where, by Travice's order—for his tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth with thirst and excitement—the startled butler had uncorked and left him a bottle of champagne.

"You're badly hill, sir," said he, pausing, as he cut the cork with his scissors.

"Yes, I've had a spill as I came along the road—ass that I was not to order down the wagonette to meet me at the station ; there—there—that will do ; you may go."

And the solemn butler bowed himself out, and hastened to join the conference in the servants' hall. Travice leaned against the massive walnut-wood sideboard, quaffing the sparkling wine, and more than once deepening its pink by a dash of brandy from a liqueur-frame. He felt how miserably "small" he seemed under the proud flashing glance of Hesbia, whose silence was becoming somewhat oppressive, and whose brown hair glittered like a shower of gold, as she stood under the lights of the gasalier, erect and tall, the broad pink stripes of her white piqué adding to her stature, and a pearl-grey jacket, trimmed with swansdown, thrown partly back from her handsome white neck.

"So—so, you're getting the whole place into holland pinafores and paper bags—eh?" said Travice, making an effort to speak, while his tongue seemed to have become larger in his mouth, and his voice more guttural. "Here's a jolly row about a beastly kite of Uncle Vere's."

"Or yours, rather."

"Well, Hesbia, can you lend me a few pounds?"

"For what purpose, sir?" she asked, sharply.

"To help me out of this place ; I am in a regular hole, upon my honour—a devil of a scrape ; bailiffs are after me ; I knocked two over, and am in danger of arrest—nothing less."

"Arrest—for what? debt, or for courting, as you have done, the fate of a felon? So, sir, in flying from capture as a swindler, you find yourself convicted of an attempt to murder. Forging on papa and seeking to kill one of his friends! oh, Travice! Travice!"

"For Heaven's sake, if not for your own, speak lower, Hesbia—consider the servants. I only meant to wing Blair, *not* to kill him ; by Jove I did, and that was all! But you are so deuced sharp with a fellow. It is my love for you,

Hesbia, that has brought all this to pass," he added, seeking, but in vain, to soften her.

"Say, rather that idleness and wickedness have done it," replied Hesbia, giving way to tears and mortification.

"I have no time to put off, cousin," said he, in a low and agitated voice, "and if you would not see me arrested here on a warrant from Liverpool concerning that blundering bill of exchange—you understand—give me your loose cash, for I have not a sixpence, and a sojourn in foreign parts will be of vast benefit to me. I thought at one time to have taken up the bill myself in time to prevent discovery, but, being ignorant of business transactions, failed. I expected to have made a good book on the Derby, and that would have scored off everything, Hesbia; but all failed me. Flying Scud—d—d brute—only ran a good second, and I got but £150—a beggarly £150, by judicious hedging. Then I was a horrid defaulter at Catterick Bridge and elsewhere. I was in a desperate fix, and neither lansquenet or unlimited loo could help me. Among those dragoon fellows—regular heavy swells, half ennuied and wholly self-satisfied idiots, who seem to have lost the use of their limbs and their brains too (if they ever had any)—I won a thousand pounds here, but all went again elsewhere—where, don't matter now; so money I must have from you, my dear cousin, that I may decamp, hook it, be off——"

"To where?"

"What does it matter? America or Boulogne; plenty of scamps bolt to both places, and why not I?"

The brow and lip of Cheatwood grew supercilious, as he thought he had very efficiently defended himself. His eyes, we have said, were pale in colour; keen when excited, languid when otherwise; his cool insolence of deportment was returning, and became effrontery as the wine invigorated him. He took another draught of the foaming Cliquot, and listened intently for a sound that might indicate pursuit or alarm.

"Have you no remorse for the shame you are bringing on my good papa?" asked Hesbia, with streaming eyes.

"None, by Jove! Your governor has always had an eye to the main chance, and to every minor chance, too; but he'll be checkmated, choused, cheated by that precious 'baronet' of his in the end, or I am a Dutchman."

"Slangy as ever. Well, Travice, have you no remorse for the shame and disgrace your conduct may bring on *me?*"

"Oh, my sweet cousin! you can take jolly good care of yourself."

"On me," she continued, "whom you have even pretended to love?"

"Pretended—yes, that's about the mark," replied Travice, into whose brain the fumes of the mixed champagne and brandy were mounting fast; "but give me some money, I tell you, and let me be off while the night lasts, and ere it be too late."

"Off to where, I ask you?"

"Why, what need is there for you to care?—anywhere—'anywhere out of the world' as the song says. By the way, talking about winging Blair," said he, resuming something of his old bullying and insolent bearing, "what right has that fellow to be prowling about this house, when you are in it—alone too? And why were you left in it alone?"

"Papa started in such haste for Liverpool," urged Hesbia, reddening with anger.

"But for that old muff—pardon me, but he is my uncle as well as your papa—writing for me to come here, and escort you to Liverpool, I might have escaped this diabolical scrape and row to-night."

"What scrape?—what row?—And how dare you speak to me thus?"

"I repeat to you," said Travice, nodding his head with tipsy solemnity, "that sheriff officers, both Scotch and English, are after me concerning that blundered bill, and if I am arrested here, many *other* things will come to light, and then what will your fine friends—your swell county acquaintances say, eh?"

This probable contingency had the deepest sting, even vulgarly as Travice worded it.

Hesbia dried her tears, which were bitter indeed, for they were those of the keenest rage and shame mingling with a nervous pride that prevailed over all. She thought of the county ladies who had—she knew not why—treated her coldly; who had even mocked her attempts and show, and reprehended her "fast ways," as they termed them; and, hastily turning aside, she was in the act of unlocking her escritoire, while Travice, who had taken a pair of scissors from her work-table, was sedulously snipping off his entire goatee-beard and long fair mustachios—a task which he had barely achieved when the bell at the entrance-door was rung furiously thrice in quick succession, and the stout fussy butler, with a face as white as his vest, entered hurriedly to announce that the "Rooral perlice were hollering at the door, and the hentire 'ouse was surrounded on hall sides!"

"Keep fast the door, and don't open it on your peril!" thundered Travice.

"But they says, sir, as they've a warrant, and will force it."

"Let them do so, if they dare; an Englishman's house is his castle."

"But we ain't in England, sir," urged the butler, who, though usually stolid and solemn, was simply petrified now. Among all the families he had ever served, "and werry 'igh class families they wos," as he assured Mademoiselle Savonette, he had never witnessed such an *esclandre* as this!

Pale and terrified, Hesbia, who knew that a criminal warrant could not be resisted, placed some gold in the hand of Travice. Then looking from the windows, she could see several men loitering in the lawn before the house, while the unmistakable burly figures of the county police in their long blue coats and black felt helmets, were visible at the front door, where they rung and knocked with all the vigour and assurance of vulgar authority; and then was heard the voice of Mr. Juden Grabbie, loudly demanding entrance "in the Queen's name."

"He at least is out of the quarry-hole!" thought Travice; "But how about Mr. Nab?"

The *last* time that old house had been assailed it was in a very different fashion, when Crichton's Grey troopers on their march to the wild and lone Airs Moss, surrounded and searched it for certain recusant divines whom the laird was supposed to shelter; but they failed to force an entrance till trumpets were blown, and many a musket and carbine had flashed redly from the greenwood shade on one side, and the old loop-holes and turrets of the house on the other. In addition to the precaution of having several auxiliaries, Travice knew well that Grabbie would take other measures, and have the more remote avenues of escape, the roads and lines of railway watched, and that descriptions of his person would be telegraphed along the wires to Glasgow, Carlisle, and elsewhere!

"Good-bye, Hesbia; God bless you, girl, if you care for such words from such a fellow as I," said Travice, with something between a sob and an imprecation in his throat, as he prepared for instant flight; "I shall get out of one of the corridor windows and drop down by one of the trees."

"You will be seen, Travice; you will be seen!"

"By whom?"

"Those wretches on the lawn."

"Well, I must make a bolt of it to the coal-pits; there I may find concealment somehow or somewhere for the night, and to-morrow is a new day."

He rushed away, and from the corridor Hesbia saw him pass safely through a window and reach the branches of a tall old chestnut-tree, down which he dropped just as the house-door was forced with a crash, and Grabbie entered in triumph with the warrant in his hand and a *posse* at his back.

Hesbia took no heed of the distant noise; her whole anxiety was that Travice should finally escape; for better, she thought, was any sequel—alas! but she could little foresee what that sequel would be—than the protracted disgrace of an arrest, imprisonment of so near a kinsman, and his trial, with all its consequent exposures. The moon was up now, and clear and brightly streamed her flood of lustre across the smoothly-mown lawn; thus, the moment Travice reached the ground, there was a shout from different points, and she could see several scouts rushing towards him.

"Away, Travice!—Away!" cried Hesbia; but he never heard her voice again.

Turning like a hunted hare, he fled in the direction of the coal-pits, throwing aside hat and coat as he ran, wildly, blindly on with despair and bitterness in his heart. Once or twice in the red gleams that shot occasionally from the workings she could detect his white figure as he glided along between the hedgerows, and once or twice she heard a distant shout from the pursuers, who were pretty numerous now, all those who had been at the forcing of the front door having drawn off and left the huge old mansion to perfect silence.

Among those who joined in the pursuit of the fugitive towards the pits was Lennard Blair, who, having conveyed the querulous Mr. Nab to a place of safety, now hurried towards the Mains of Kames as fast as his stiffened limb would permit; and ignorant of how the whole affair would terminate—whether in the arrest of Travice, in his concealment among the miners, or in his ultimate escape from the vicinity, a result for which she devoutly prayed—Hesbia in tears and extreme agitation, with her heart oppressed by shame and anger, sat by the open window of her dressing-room, with her eyes fixed on the moon-lighted landscape (while the now silent Savonette dressed her long flowing hair) anxious to catch any distant sound from which she might gather information, and longing for the morrow when she was to meet Lennard Blair at their trysting place, the stile, and for the coming night which would see her *en route* for home again, and far away from the scene of all this mortification.

But there was to be no tender meeting on the morrow!

Save the bay of an occasional watch-dog at the yellow harvest moon all sounds had died away, and the far-stretching landscape seemed to sleep in the calm and liquid sheen. Up soared the moon, her disc seeming to grow smaller but clearer, as she climbed into the wide blue vault, and then the angularities, the slated turrets, and quaint masses of the old castellated house came forth alternately in vivid light, while portions between were sunk in deepest shadow. Over the dark bronze or russet-coloured woods the hills towered up to heaven, and Hesbia sat with her hands clasped, her cheek pale and wet with recent tears, praying for the escape of Travice, that all might be saved from further shame on his account. Then, amid these aspirations, she wondered in her heart whether all that she and Lennard hoped for would ever come to pass, and felt with something like awe that when again she looked upon these moonlit hills and woods their fate would be decided, and that all would be over for better or for worse—that they should have one path in life, or be parted for ever! For ever? and he loved her so much!

Anon the pale face of the miserable fugitive came vividly before her, with all its alternate insolence or craven cowardice, as passion moved him; his bitter hate and utter absence of all shame for his degraded position and dishonour of his friends.

"Oh, is such a creature's earthly future worth praying for?" she exclaimed, with more of exasperation than pity, as she thrust aside even Fussy, her silky-haired Skye terrier; for so pre-occupied was Hesbia, that the little animal, wont to be so petted, quite failed to obtain the smallest caress.

Hark! what was that? Suddenly the placid stillness of the night and of the air was broken by a strange, a terrible, and most unwonted sound!

A tremendous roar—an explosion—as of thunder shook the ground, making the affrighted birds fly hither and thither in wood and field; it was dull, muffled, and altogether peculiar, for it seemed to be under the surface of the earth; then all the lights at the Mains of Kames disappeared, and in their place a vast black column of smoke and dusky vapour, earth, and stones shot high into the calm and clear blue moonlit sky; and Hesbia, as she gazed with strained and starting eyes at a scene and circumstances so unexpected and bewildering, felt her heart grow still with terror and apprehension—she knew not of what!

The obscurity about the Kames continued to increase till the dark vapour seemed to shroud the whole place, and the

waning of the moon behind the hills added to the sudden gloom that involved all the once bright and busy scene. Then flickering lights, like those of torches, began to glimmer out of the darkness; excited voices and shrill cries, even painful shrieks, rang forth upon the night; and she could hear the footsteps of many persons running along the nearest road, as they seemed to make with all speed to the point of alarm,—the Mains of Kames.

"What catastrophe is this? what horror can have happened?" asked Hesbia, starting from her seat, as the butler, with Savonette, rushed in, exclaiming,—

"Oh, Miss 'Esbia! oh, Miss Vere! the most 'orrible, the most hawful noos! The coalpits have blown hup and are a-fire, with the men in the workings, and not one will come alive to hupper hair again!"

"Speak, Savonette!" said Hesbia, pressing her hands on her breast; "is this actually the case?"

"Oui, miladi, and worser—much worser!"

"What *can* be worse than such a horror?" exclaimed Hesbia.

"Ah, Sacré Dieu! ah, Mère de Dieu!" cried the excitcable Frenchwoman, throwing up her hands and eyes; "how can I tell you—tell you all?"

"Of what—what?"

"M'sieur Travicc hid himself in ze pits, and Messieurs Blair and Grabbie went down after him, and are all there with the poor workmans now, in one great conflagration!"

"In the pits?" said Hesbia, in a faint voice, as she turned with terror to the black column that towered into the sky.

"Vraiment—oui, in ze pits, which is all as one huge morgue—one grave of death and fire!"

Though her heart was chilled by a deadly and devouring terror Hesbia neither screamed nor swooned, nor made a scene of any kind; but a desperate calmness seemed to possess her; and, moreover, she could not believe that Lennard had actually gone where her soubrette asserted. She felt assured that he was the last person to make himself unnecessarily active in the arrest or prosecution of her erring kinsman.

"Savonette, get me a hat and warm cloak; I shall go to the pits in person, and you shall both accompany me; and, to prevent mistakes," she added, "send a servant at once to Oakwoodlee, to inquire for Mr. Blair, and say that I require his assistance instantly."

Hesbia set forth with her excited attendants; and Buttons, who had been despatched with her message to Oak-

woodlee, soon overtook her, with the assurances of the startled Stephen Hislop that "Mr. Blair had not been at home since noon, and that no one knew where he was!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHEATWOOD'S LAST CIGAR.

In the hunted fugitive who flew past him on the highway near the village, Lennard Blair had barely time to recognize Cheatwood, so he stood irresolute, till Juden Grabbie and his legal *posse* came up in full cry, and then he joined apparently in the pursuit, but solely in the hope of aiding in the ultimate escape of the offender, for the sake of Hesbia and her father.

After they had lost sight of Travice, traces of his route were found; in one place his hat, in another his overcoat—a smart reefing jacket, which he had thrown away that he might run with the greater ease. A shout escaped the pursuers when they came in sight of him for the last time, as he sped through the street of the collier village. He was seen to turn up a lane towards the nearest coal-pit, and then all trace of him was lost, and Grabbie, Lennard, and those who accompanied them were completely at fault. They searched the engine-house, the piles of coal, the waggons, and all the various sheds and out-buildings, in vain; Travice Cheatwood had vanished!

While his followers were examining the premises, Grabbie had been peering into the pit-mouth, down which the long chain was still descending; he was listening to every sound, but none came upward on the cold rush of air, save the occasional jarring of the circular basket, as it slid swiftly into the profundity below.

Two men who were superintending the winch or steam-engine would accord him no information, and surlily warned him to "be off about his own business;" but, heedless of this order, and intent only on the purpose which brought him there, Grabbie drew the attention of Lennard to certain footmarks which, in the united glare of the gas-lights and furnace of the engine, were distinctly visible in the soft black mud about the mouth of the pit. They were evidently made by a pair of fashionably-shaped boots, with high and small round heels; and they could be traced distinctly up to the wooden platform round the verge of the pit, from whence the wearer did not seem to have returned.

"Should you know this Travice Cheatwood, Mr. Blair, if

you saw him?" asked Grabbie, with a grin, as he rubbed his grisly chin.

"Yes—perfectly."

"Even if dressed as a collier?"

"I think so—in any disguise; but I don't believe it at all probable that he would adopt one so grimy and unpleasant," urged Lennard, anxiously, and about to turn away.

"We are on the right scent, I'll take my affidavit that we are!" said Grabbie, emphatically; "the basket or tub has just gone down, and I am certain our man is in it, though these two rapscallions won't admit that such is the case!"

Grabbie, though inexorable in his spite and wrath, was strictly legal, however, in all his measures. Leaving certain men to watch the mouth of the pit, and sending others to the escape or air-shaft, he proceeded in quest of the manager, showed his warrant, and insisted on admission to all the mines if necessary. Permission was at once accorded, for well did the manager know that the legal bully of the village would brook no trifling.

Still anxious to save Travice, Lennard left nothing unsaid to dissuade all from seeking him underground, till in the end he resolved to go down also, as he was not without a hope—a feeble one, certainly—of concealing or getting him away by some other outlet, for this pit communicated with others; and in the six years during which Mr. Vere had possessed the property and done so much for these coal-mines, Lennard had frequently been through them, and was familiar with most of the seams, cuttings, and workings of the place.

When Travice was tearing at his utmost speed along the road, he almost wished that his way lay near some steep precipice, over which he might fling himself; or near some deep water, in the silent depths of which he might plunge headlong, and never rise to light or life again. Mortification, despair, and rage were his prevailing emotions—mortification for his baffled schemes and loss of position; despair at the prospect of being taken, tried, and sentenced to a penalty, the seclusion and degradation of which would be maddening to one of his temperament; and, finally, he felt a bitter rage at all who were now in league against him. With all these was the exasperating sense of being helplessly and pitilessly hunted like a wild animal, and in his heart, though it was a craven one, there rose at times a fierce longing to face about, to close with, and to strangle or otherwise destroy, the nearest of his pursuers! But onward he ran, past trees and hedges, cottages and farm-

yards, where children shouted and dogs barked after him, the tramp of feet on the hard roadway behind adding speed to his flight, while the openness of the country and the brilliance of the moon rendered futile any hope of escape through the fields on either side.

The suggestion of one peasant to another as Travice flew past the cottage door at which they were smoking, "he was surely one o' the folk frae the madhouse, where twa were tint (missed) yesterday," led him to infer the danger of seeking refuge in any dwelling.

Could he but reach the Kaims! There he knew were many outhouses, sheds, stables, and other buildings, wherein he might lie concealed for a time. Inspired by this idea, he hurried through the village in full view of his pursuers, and turned up a little alley, as already related, towards the nearest pit. Some miners were just getting into the basket as he drew near, and very like melo-dramatic fiends the poor fellows looked, they were so black and grimy, with their teeth and eyeballs glistening white, in the lambent flames of the safety-lamps, which each carried on his head, as if to complete the illusion.

"I shall trust these men," thought Travice, and, ere giving the word to descend, they paused and swung in the basket over the vast profundity of the pit, as he approached them in hot haste.

Travice feared that if he asked permission to descend on the plea of curiosity at that unusual hour, with his attire in such disorder after his flight, and being minus a hat, the miners would for a certainty deem him one of the missing lunatics; and to attempt to join them without some proper explanation would ensure his rough expulsion from the basket.

"My good men," said he, "I am an unfortunate fellow who is about to be arrested for debt. That sordid wretch, Juden Grabbie, is after me with the police, and ever so many of his people; you will save me, won't you?"

"If we can, we shall!" said emphatically one of the miners, who all knew Grabbie personally or by evil report.

"Then take me down with you for to-night—for this night only—by Jove I'm lost—I hear these scoundrels coming!"

"A' richt, sir—jump in; come alang wi' us," said the miners, cheerily: "we'll be aucht hours in the pit."

"That will do—eight hours?"

"Aye, sir—one shift o' aucht hours, and then a longer spell in the slack or off shift."

This was about as intelligible as Sancrit or Oordoo to Travice; but he knew that eight hours of successful concealment might enable him to escape.

"Gie me your hand, sir—jump, sir—steady, so—and we'll tak' gude care o' ye;" and the moment he was in, a signal was given, and they vanished from the surface.

Travice had never been in a pit before, and he seemed to lose his breath in the rapidity of the descent, as it seemed, into the bowels of the earth. Fixed in the basket, he stood erect, like his four companions, and all grasped the chain. Down, down they glided, with a steady and scarcely perceptible motion, through a cylinder of some six feet in diameter, solidly built all round. He could not and dared not look below; he cast his eyes upward to where the surface of the earth was receding, and to where the sky was reduced to a small round patch of deep cold blue, out of which some stars twinkled with a brilliance that seemed unnatural. Noises and voice overhead became indistinct, and anon passed away; then nothing was heard but the rush of cold air upward, and the jarring of the basket as it swept down its cylinder of stone.

The lamps in the miners' hats gave a grotesque horror to the deepening gloom, and when at a vast depth Travice felt his head grow giddy, compelling him to look down, he struck his brow against the side of the pit, and might have fallen from the basket, had not the strong arm of a miner (who growled an angry oath in his ear) been cast around him. His face, which had been all a-glow with exercise, and seemed so red in the glare of the lights near the pit-mouth, looked so cold, white, and stern in the gleams of their safety-lamps, that the miners regarded him and each other with an instinctive uneasiness that might have been the foreboding of what was to ensue.

Down, down yet, through strata of limestone, trap, and friable slate; and now icy drops of water and tiny pieces of coal struck him at times on the face. Dreary was the silence, and dreary the darkness, and now voices and sounds began to ascend as from a world *below;* then lights and moving figures appeared, as the space suddenly widened on all sides.

"Steady the basket!" cried a hoarse voice; then the motion ceased, and Travice Cheatwood found himself more than two hundred feet below the upper earth and air; while the novelty of his situation, and the suddenness with which it came to pass, though it brought a certain sense of security after his recent flight, made his heart beat almost

painfully. Yet he strove to carry a brave air to those about him.

"My good fellows, you have been very kind to me," said he, as he opened his purse and put into the hard palms of the men almost a handful of Hesbia's money.

"By my faith, sir!" exclaimed one, "had I been like you——"

"In what respect?"

"Sae rich, I mean."

"Rich, indeed! well?"

"I'd hae seen this black hole at the deil, before venturing into it."

"At the devil—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"My dear fellow, I fear I was going *that* way after all, and only took this *en route*, you see."

"It's hard to hae to flee for honest debt," said the miner; "but tak ye tent noo, and learn for the future to put your hand twice to your bonnet for once to your pouch."

For a time the fugitive could distinguish nothing; all seemed dark or vague, and shadowy uncertainties; ghost-like outlines of human figures were passing to and fro: then columns of coal, caverns of coal, seams of coal, blackness, damp, grime, horror, and discomfort everywhere began gradually to make themselves visible by the light of the covered lamps. The columns were generally composed of that slaty kind of stone which usually accompanies coal, and exhibits the impression of fossil fish, of ferns and other plants which had grown and passed away ere the seas and volcanic fires of unknown ages hurled rocks and mountains upon mighty forests till land and water changed their places.

In no disposition to moralize, Travice Cheatwood looked shudderingly around him. Some thirty men or more were at work in the pit, and three several Shetland ponies were employed to draw the coal from the more remote parts of the workings to the main shaft; and all these sturdy little animals by the darkness were rendered blind now, and were more shaggy and uncombed than when they had roamed in wild herds over the green grassy holms and surf-beaten voes of their breezy native isles.

"Eight hours!" thought Travice, as he looked at his watch; "if I reach the surface again by two or three to-morrow morning, I may get clear off to a distance before daybreak; but to be eight hours here—perhaps more—ugh! how shall I endure them?"

After a time he began to see objects with more clearness,

and could move about between the pillars of coal or slate that were left at regular intervals to support the roof of the mine (about a foot or so above his head), and he could not avoid shuddering, when he saw in some places men nearly nude, lying at full length, and working sideways, or, like rats in a drain, crawling into the narrower seams that sloped upward or downward as the strata lay at various angles, and picking out the coal with an axe from between the successive layers of lime and iron-stone.

"Work, my man," said a collier who had been eyeing him with some curiosity, for his story had been noised about in the mine; "it will be gude for you, and help to spend the eerie time; there's a baggie—a wee slype for three hundredweight; drag that to the nearest seam, and fill it wi' coal if you can fyle your dainty hands wi' sic work."

The half scornful laugh of the man sounded harshly, as it was reverberated among the echoes of the mine; but Travice looked with wonder and horror at human beings dragging those "slypes," some of them on hands and knees, through narrow seams in the stratum of coal, in literal suits of harness composed of straps and chains; and by such miserable means as these are brought to upper air the garnered stores of past and unknown ages, to meet the requirements of our time, and to aid with iron and electricity in bringing together the ends of the earth, and achieving a new destiny for man!

"Od' man, when I was a halfling bairn," resumed the miner, "I've dragged four and forty rakes a day, in a fifty-six pound timmer basket, and keepit my auld mother in ease and comfort by her ingle cheek! What think ye o' that?"

But the wretched Travice, who scarcely understood a word the Scotsman said, only shivered, and made no response. Though not of a very imaginative turn, when he looked around him and contemplated the dreary vault from which the moisture (distilled, perhaps, from drains and rivulets far above their heads), plashed in the unseen pools below, the blackness everywhere, save when the Davy lamps of the workers gave out uncertain gleams; the strange noises; the clank of unseen chains; the singular and unnatural echoes; the noxious vapours; the exhalation of gases and the intense heat of the atmosphere, suggestive of fire-damp (of which there had been many unpleasant rumours of late), all might have conduced to make him believe that he had passed away from mortal life, and was now in the infernal regions!

Juden Grabbie he knew was on his track; but what of

Mr. Nathan Nab, of the Liverpool detective force? How had he fared after his rough tumble into the old quarry? What if he was dead! What would the coroner's inquest say? There was no such tribunal in Scotland; but there was a local Procurator Fiscal whose name was suggestive he knew not of what; and Travice remembered how he once saw an inquest in England, with all the genteel idlers of a petty cathedral city, the curious tradesfolks, the grimy mob, and the street urchins hovering about an inn where a dead body lay on a table, in all its rigidity and horrid angularity, covered by a white sheet. Was he the same Travice Cheatwood, who, notwithstanding all his monetary trouble, gambling shifts, and recklessness, had led a life of tolerable luxury, ease, idleness, and fashionable dissipation; who at times when he had made up a successful book on a few races had kept his hunters and drag, with a box at the opera, and a cottage at St. John's Wood; who could prove himself a judge of the best wine and a good horse; who occasionally associated with men of rank and money, tuft-hunters, turfites, and gamblers however; and who, from being a member of his uncle's luxurious household, the companion—even the would-be lover of the beautiful Hesbia—*l'intime du maison*, ever since Sir Cullender Crowdy ("that peculiar fishy party," as he always called him) had left—could he, he asked of himself—be the same man who was now sunk to an ebb so low that he was a fugitive, glad to lurk in a hideous coal mine, fleeing from charges of felony, the associate and the protected of those he deemed but poor degraded slaves, yet each of whom was fearless and free, and when compared with him, to be envied!

Travice could almost have wept in his rage; and with intense bitterness of heart he sighed heavily. He looked at his watch again. Another hour had actually elapsed—but only one hour; how long and dreary it had seemed!

Six, perhaps seven more hours must be passed in that horrible place, for such it seemed to Travice, though the industrious bread-winners of half the adjacent village toiled there in sturdy cheerfulness. Hastily he put up his watch, for it was a handsome gold one, and he trembled lest it might excite the cupidity of some of those grimy men, who worked like pantomimic fiends or the gnomes of a German story in those dark seams and fissures, where a blow from a pickaxe might find him a sure and secret grave for ever. In searching his pockets he found a last cigar in his case, and with a muttered exclamation of intense satisfaction, he drew it forth, leisurely bit off the end, and, ignorant of the atmo-

spheric dangers by which he was surrounded, looked about him for a—light! Near him was a Davy lamp, which one of the miners had placed on a pillar of coal. It was one of those very lamps which the philanthropic Sir Humphrey invented, with a lid of tissue wire so constructed that it might be used with safety even in the most explosive mines. In his ignorance, the unfortunate Travice unlocked and removed the tissue cover, and was proceeding very deliberately to light his cigar, when a heavy hand was laid on his arm, and his eyes were met by the malignant smile that glittered in those of Juden Grabbie.

Ere either could speak, there came a wild cry—a shriek of alarm from various parts of the mine—"The lamp, the lamp! Fly to the shaft, fly for your lives! Fire, fire!"

Then followed a terrific—a blinding explosion, and all the pit was involved in darkness, smoke, and chaos—agony and death.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BURNING MINE.

Accompanied by Mademoiselle Savonette, and one or two other servants, Hesbia was soon at the scene of the disastrous calamity, where a soul-stirring, bewildering, and terrible spectacle awaited her. The engine-house, the offices, and sheds around the mouth of the yawning shaft were crowded by pale and terrified people who, on the first note of alarm, had rushed there from the adjacent village. Many of these were the wives, mothers, children, and friends of those who were in the mine, and their wailings and lamentations were heard at intervals amid the fierce roaring of the red flames that rushed skyward from the pit, and the excited voices of the gathering workmen, who were bravely ready to do any task that might be assigned them by any one in authority.

Two hundred feet and more below where they stood, it was known that from thirty to forty men, living or dead, were immured in that subterranean tomb of fire, the sides and roof, floor and entire substance of which, all served to feed the great element of destruction.

The flames from the shaft lit up the whole locality, dispelling the gloom of night after the moon waned, and casting strange weird gleams and shadows on the faces of the excited and agonised watchers, and on the mysterious-looking machinery, the clumsy beams, the grimy wheels and chains of the

engine-house. And now, to add to the grief and consternation of many who might already be widowed and childless, yet knew it not, a bellowing roar at a little distance announced the explosion of another mine, with which the workings of the first one communicated and a dense pall of black smoke filled all the air, overhanging the startled and now almost deserted village, where every door was left wide open, and every fireside abandoned; and in fatuous grief and terror, the names of those who were too surely supposed to be perishing, were lovingly called in varying tones, amid sobs and shrieks that seemed to load the air.

In the first shaft the flames soon began to subside, or to shoot up their black mouth at intervals only; so fires of coal were speedily set ablaze, and the wavering light of these, as they flared upon the night wind, tipped every neighbouring object with fire. On the brown, crisp woods of the old manor house, and far away by Oakwoodlee; on the beetling brow of Craigellon, and the slopes of the more distant hills; even on the gilded weathercock of the secluded church, making it shine like a red star, fell the ruddy light; and on the green mounds of the Kaims (or old Roman camp), which were verdant and grassy, and had been old, by more than a thousand years, in the days when Hector Boethius (who knew neither of coal nor of coal-pits) recorded that the men of Fife and the Lothians were wont to dig a black stone, which, when kindled, gave forth a heat that would melt iron.

Till the flames completely subsided below nothing could be done in the way of exploration or descent, and the gathered people, the wailing, the weeping, and the hopeless, could but watch and wait, and wring their hands and pray. Clutching Savonette (who had completely exhausted the entire and somewhat ample vocabulary of French interjections expressive of wonder and horror), Hesbia Vere, seated or standing, lingered among the heaps of *débris*, coals, shale, and rubbish, while continuing to gaze in a species of stupor at the mouth of the pit, which for a time seemed but as the vent of a mighty furnace.

Of the vast monetary loss this calamity would inevitably prove to her father, and how it might yet affect *herself*, she had not then a single thought. From the men in charge of the engine-house, both of whom she questioned closely, she learned beyond a doubt, that Lennard Blair, with whose appearance they were quite familiar, one whom she knew must be her cousin Travice, and a third, Mr. Judeu Grabbie, were all in the pit, and too probably would never leave it,

for already the engineer, the manager, and others in charge were speaking of having it deluged with water, "lest," as they phrased it, "the seams might fire again."

Could it be possible, she thought, that he who loved her so well, the handsome Lennard Blair—he whose dark eyes had so lately been gazing with tenderness into her own; whose kiss had been so recently on her cheek, whose voice and loving smile were vividly in her mind, was down—down that dark, flaming, and mysterious gulph! It seemed all a phantasmagoria—a nightmare—a horrible unreality.

He was absent from home, of that there could be no doubt, and the rapidly spread rumour that "the young laird" (so was he fondly named still by many) was in the pits, speedily brought to the spot his two dependants—the tottering Stephen Hislop, propped on his staff, and the active yet querulous Elsie Graham; and there too gathered fast to give advice or aid, Dr. Feverley, the Rev. Dr. Kirkford, mounted on his cob; Ranald Cheyne on a foam-flecked roadster; the Ground Baillie: the Sheriff, a solemn and priggish personage; the Procurator-Fiscal, a fussy little country solicitor with keen ferret-eyes, a white shirt frill, and a huge Laurence-kirk box, from which ever and anon he took pinches of snuff; the chief constable in his uniform, and hundreds of others to gratify their curiosity, till a dense throng on foot or horseback filled up all the excited neighbourhood.

Community of sentiment or grief drew Elsie near to where, with a warm cloak and rich velvet hood drawn over her, Hesbia Vere was seated on a pile of stones.

"Oh, Elsie," said Miss Vere, weeping freely when she saw how bitterly the old woman wept, "this has come upon me as if it had been a thunderbolt from heaven!"

"Aye, madam, and from heaven came the stroke, though why or wherefore, we canna say and canna see!" moaned Elsie, rocking her person to and fro in all the abandonment of grief.

"It is a great, a most unaccountable accident."

"Hech, aye, aye!" replied the old woman shaking her head; "and when sic accidents come, they bode mair ill-fortune than folk may at first decern."

"Evil-fortune, Elsie, woman!" expostulated Steinie, whose silver hairs were glistening in the light of the watch-fires. "The ill-luck and danger, the suffering and death are a' here in plenty without boding mair."

"Aye, but mair must and *will* happen!" croaked Elsie.

"Do you think so?" asked Hesbia, anxiously.

"She says truth, Miss Vere," said the minister, Dr. Kirk-

ford, who had now dismounted and held his Galloway by its bridle ; "from what the engineers are saying, I fear that your father's pits are ruined for ever."

"I heed not the pits, sir," said Hesbia, amid a torrent of tears ; "I think only of those who are in them. Oh, Dr. Kirkford, how long may the fire continue to burn there below?"

"Who can say? There are mines in Fife that have continued to smoulder on for ages."

"Ages! and what is the first cause?"

"Fulminating damp, which in general can only be kindled by flame, through gross carelessness or deliberate malice."

"Malice, Doctor!" echoed Hesbia, connecting the idea with her cousin Travice.

"Yes," replied the portly old man, as he patted her shoulder ; "such things have been."

"But wilfully or maliciously to set fire to a coal-mine is felony, without benefit of clergy, by the tenth Parliament of George II.," said the Procurator-Fiscal, who stood by, tapping his snuff-box complacently.

"Tell me, Doctor, do—do—do you think that all in the pit must be——"

"Be what, Miss Vere?"

"Dead by this time?" asked Hesbia, in a broken voice.

"I cannot say; I would earnestly and prayerfully hope not!"

"Oh, why should such horrors be? It is surely not the will of God."

"Why have we war and pestilence, shipwrecks, earthquakes, and sudden death? Man is a free agent, my dear Miss Vere ; but strange it is, that such wholesale calamities as this should come of our enterprize, and our development of science and skill! So what avails the promise that was given of old: 'I will bring thee to a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass: where thou shalt lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks.' Science draws together the ends of the earth, yet in its pursuit and development men must die as these poor fellows are too probably dying now."

And politely lifting his broad-brimmed hat, the stout and kindly old clergyman moved away to those whom he thought required his ministrations and comforting assurances more than the fashionable young lady—the wives and children of the men who were in the pit.

Miss Hesbia drew a little way aside with Elsie and Savonette. In the horror of a conviction that Lennard had perished, impressed by the active terrors of the scene, and

by the noisy but natural grief of the people around her, she forgot all her (occasional) selfish fears of how a life of comparative poverty could be spent with him, in case her father cast them off, or commercial disaster overtook them all; for such fears she had not been without of late.

But Lennard was gone—too probably gone for ever—by a dreadful death, scorched perhaps out of the semblance of humanity, and entombed in that subterranean catacomb—so she could weep for him freely now, and, for a time, cared not even if her cold father knew that she had loved him.

Her absorbing question was, what purpose had taken him into such a strange place as the pit, and with such a pitiful creature as Juden Grabbie? That secret object, alas! she might never know, and she might never look upon his face again. The pit was on fire and he *within it!* So there was nothing to be done but wait in agony—nothing, nothing—but to wait for the end.

"Oh, Miss Vere," said Elsie in a low voice, as she crouched at Hesbia's feet and still rocked herself to and fro; "the puir lad that's gane loved you—loved you weel!"

"Hush, Elsie! hush!"

"And wherefore should I hush?" asked the old woman, almost sternly, as she lifted her head. "My brave lamb was proud of it, and surely *you* dinna feel ashamed?"

"Ah no, Elsie, you mistake me; but you see how sorrow and trouble come upon us all in turns, rich as well as poor."

"True, true, Miss Vere, to every one in the world; but this stroke is a heavy one to me. I was his nurse in the auld house up the brae yonder, and he became to me even as my ain bairn when his puir mother died. You are young and rich and winsome, and may soon find others to love you; but I am a lonely, forsaken auld body, and shall never have another to love *me* as he did! And oh, Miss Vere, it seems but as yesterday when I had him on my knee a smiling wean, round as an egg and straight as a lance; but never mair can these auld hands of mine smooth his shining curls o' gold; for they were golden as the bells o' the bonnie broom bush, when he was a bairn!" said Elsie, her native accent deepening with her grief, which at times became uncontrollable.

"Blairavon is gane—wood, hill, and muirland; and now the last o' the auld stock that hae hunted and hosted, feasted—aye, and fought wi' kings—hath gane too," said Hislop, as he struck his staff into the turf. "So you and I, Elsie, hae been ower lang here; we hae outlived our kith, our kindred and our time!"

"His name, I fear me, was an unlucky one. Why did the auld laird name his first-born after his drowned brother Lennard?"

"Because he did so love that brother," said Steinie.

So the exciting hours of the night wore on, and Hesbia lingered there listening, as one in a dream, to those about her, speaking of fire-damp, of gaseous exhalations through fissures in the rocks, of Davy lamps, and the recklessness of miners in leaving them open or unlocked; of their smoking, and having lucifers in their pockets; of turning water into the mine; and to the vague and often wild suggestions made by the excited, the ignorant, or unthinking; till murmurs of hope began to mingle with the sobs of women and children, as the flames from the pit became less and less, and after a time died completely away, leaving its round black mouth of calcined brick and stone, yawning in the light of the flaming cressets and coal-heaps. Anxiously and intently many an ear and many a yearning face were bent over the fatal pit; but no sound came upward from the horrid depth below. Had all then perished?

Hesbia was liberal and open-handed, and from the great house she had brought and distributed by the butler's hands, spirits, wines, food, and money too, among the workers, and the anxious, pale, and affrighted women who lingered in sorrow around that disastrous grave, which certain brave fellows were now making vigorous preparations to descend and explore.

By this time Mr. Vere had been telegraphed for by his ground bailie, and was speeding north by the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway; and now when his handsome young daughter, whose soft dishevelled hair seemed turned to ruddy gold by the lights that flamed around the pit, rose at last to retire, the eyes and the blessings of many followed her.

Hesbia was becoming exhausted, so Mr. Cheyne resolutely took her home, urged by Feverley, whose professional duty kept him at the scene of the accident. And now the long and miserable night, which had seemed like an age to many there, was passing away, for in the east the faint grey of dawn was stealing in; the peaks of the highest hills began to brighten, as the light stole down their grassy slopes, and the shadows gave place to it even in the valleys. The cold stars paled and faded out one by one, and the light of the watch-fires began to sink and die, as the brilliant sun of a glorious autumn morning, through bars of crimson and amber, shed his warmth over the beautiful scenery; the birds twittered in the hedgerows, and the hawk hung aloft

in mid-air ; the corn-fields rolled their golden billows, and the dewy woodlands rustled their crisp foliage in the soft wind that came from the western hills. But many an eye was red with weeping and watching ; many a heart was sick and sore with grief ; and many a hardy bread-winner's place and chair were empty in the once busy and happy little village of Blairavon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NEXT MORNING.

THE early morning train brought Mr. Vere to the place of the calamity, where he could do nothing but hear clamours, griefs, complaints, and applications, with threats of legal proceedings for underground mismanagement,—from all of which he turned away wearied, worried, and profoundly disgusted, to the now half-dismantled and partially shut up manor-house. There Hesbia, pale, unslept, and exhausted, was awaiting him. She had never been to bed, but for a time had reposed on a sofa in her room, in momentary expectation of hearing some tidings from the fatal mine. After sunrise she rang for her attendant.

"Papa has been telegraphed for, Savonette ; he will be here this morning, beyond a doubt, to breakfast ; and he must not perceive or detect the great grief this accident has cost me."

"Why, Miladi ?"

"I have my own reasons."

A few hours had served to make Hesbia again politic, and partially to restore Vere's influence over her.

"Oui, mademoiselle ; I comprehend now," said the soubrette, with a sad but knowing smile.

"Good ; then make my toilette one that may deceive him, at least by removing, so far as possible, traces of all I have undergone since last night."

The soubrette applied herself diligently to her mistress's beautiful hair, and produced from the magnificent silver inlaid dressing-case the Bohemian crystal and Dresden bottles of perfumes, pomade, Rimmel's *Vinaigre de Toilette*, *Blanc de Perles*, and many other mysterious compounds, wherewith to cool Hesbia's skin, to brighten her eyes, and remove all appearance of languor, tears, and the sorrow of the past night. Her dress, a morning robe of bright blue, trimmed with white braid and with much white lace, espepecially about the bosom, neck, and loose wide sleeves,

suited well the fulness of her figure and the usually brilliant character of her beauty; but now her colour was gone, her lips unnaturally red, and the lids of her handsome eyes were heavy and drooping.

Hesbia was doubtless somewhat of a sensationalist, and for a time had fully indulged in all "the luxury of woe;" but now her chief task was to conceal from her own father the misery of her heart; that one whose step and voice could send the life-blood careering through it, and through every pulse, was gone too probably to the world of shadows, and that the touch of his "vanished hand" would thrill on hers no more! She repented now of many times when she had wounded and piqued him, parried his attentions or ignored them; received them coldly, and even flirted furiously with others for her own amusement. All that was long since over now.

This was the day when she was to have bade farewell to him and returned to Liverpool, escorted by Travice—farewell but only for a short time, as he was so soon to follow her, and then a crisis would come for sorrow or joy! There she had many gay friends and gossips to meet and gaieties to plunge into—gaieties such as were unknown to rural Blairavon; but where were now the joys of future years? where the bright visions she had begun so recently to picture? Her Eden was blasted—blighted even as the fabled Rose Garden of Irem was blighted to punish the pride of the Son of Ad.

Morning stole on; the train was long since in, but her father did not appear. Maxwell, his valet, however, arrived with a message "that, though weary with travelling all night, he had gone to the Kaims, and should soon be home to breakfast," and so in the desperate hope that he would bring her some sure—she could scarcely hope for happy—tidings, she sat at an open window of the dining-room, listlessly waiting and watching. Through it the soft breath of the cool autumnal morning came stealing in, and wafting the fragrance of the monthly roses and the borders of mignonette; but now the gardeners had left their task of tending the cuttings of pansies and pinks, the planting of polyanthuses, the propping of gorgeous dahlias and towering hollyhocks, and other flowers and work of the season, to use their spades for a better purpose in digging at the pits in the cause of mercy and the hope of rescue.

The fragrance of the last few flowers of autumn came unpleasantly and without charm to Hesbia; there would be no meeting to-day at the lonely stile on the grassy path to

Craigellon ; and as such occasional tender excitements were necessary to her existence, after her past coquetries, the world seemed an emptiness—a horrid blank, indeed ! When Mr. Vere entered, she rushed into his arms.

"What news, papa, from that dreadful place of sorrow ?"

"Sorrow and *loss*, too—very considerable loss, let me tell you, my dear girl," said he, sourly.

"Of course, papa—well ?"

"Not a sound can be detected in the pit, Hesbia. At the edge of the shaft, two of the miners lay down with their faces over the edge, and together raised a shout that was both loud and long, and it rung with a wondrous sound in dark profundity. Again and again they shouted, and there came back——"

"Oh, papa—what ?"

"Only the long-drawn echoes of their cry, and when these died away all remained silent as the grave below. But workers and diggers are going down in regular gangs and spells to clear away the rubbish, which has accumulated or fallen in the cuttings of the pit, and ere long they hope to get at the bodies——"

"Oh, Heavens !"

"And send them up in slings. The carpenters of the village have already prepared several coffins—plain deal things (however plain I shall have them all to pay for !) to the pit-head. And now let me to breakfast," he added, seating himself at the table. "I've been travelling all night—came off the moment I got the telegram, though it was useless to send for me. But can there be any truth in the story of Travice Cheatwood and Lennard Blair, too, being *both* in the pit ?" he asked, suddenly, while observing her keenly ; but Hesbia kept her face in shadow.

"Yes, papa," she replied, while the tears rushed to her eyes ; "they are there too surely, I fear."

"Why, what business,—coffee, not tea if you please, Hesbia,—what business had either of them down there ; at night, too ? It seems incredible—unaccountable ; yet I have heard it on all hands, from that old blubbering Scotsman Hislop, too, with some story of a previous struggle and attempted arrest—arrest of whom ?"

"Travice, papa ; you could not think it was Mr. Blair."

"Of course not—but hush at present ; I know too much of Master Travice and his precious affairs. You have begun to pack I see, and to have the house nearly ready for shutting up. Maxwell ! the marmalade—Thanks."

He was her father, yet Hesbia gazed with wonder at the

placidity with which he sat before her, looking so calm, so sleek and young in air and bearing, and with his perpetual smile while making his morning repast; yet a keener eye than hers might have detected under that commercial mask a secret expression of worry and harassment, while he took ham and egg, game and fish from the butler and Maxwell, who were both in attendance, and ventured from time to time to join a little—a very little, as Mr. Vere was not condescending—in the conversation when it turned on the recent catastrophe, for in that locality of course every one's mind was full of it. Though she endeavoured to conceal her emotions, Vere saw his daughter's grief, and knew that it was not all for her cousin Travice; but he ignored it.

"By Jove," thought he, when they were left to themselves by the withdrawal of the servants, whose presence on this occasion was boredom to them both, "I never imagined that she cared so much for that fellow! So you don't know what object took Blair down the pit?" he asked, heedless of how he might sting her heart by the abrupt question.

"No, papa, I do not; I cannot even suppose."

"I have been told that he was not unfrequently there—a strange taste!"

"Yes, he used to go when little more than a boy, while you were first having these pits made; and sometimes he pressed me to accompany him."

"Indeed!—What business—but you never went?"

"Never, papa; I was too terrified. Then he was such a favourite with the miners, and all the workpeople hereabout."

"Yes," said Vere, with a grimace, "more, perhaps, than I, who have spent so much wealth among them, and have literally created that collier village where only green fields lay before. Such a row they make about a few wretched lives lost in a coal mine! I'll warrant these folks here took the news of the battle of the Alma, the Indian Mutiny, or the great earthquakes in South America quietly enough!"

"The death and the suffering incident to these events were far from their own hearths, papa."

"And they even threaten me with legal proceedings—the ungrateful wretches!"

"Prosecution, papa—you—how?"

"Oh, under the 'Mines Inspection Act,' concerning working with unlocked safety-lamps, as if I could know whether or not such were the case. Yet that fussy little beast of a Procurator Fiscal and that legal snob of a sheriff, both hinted as much. And then there is Travice——"

"Oh, papa, do not talk of poor Travice now—I implore you—with anger at least."

"But others will, and handle his name pretty roughly, for there are a thousand scandals attached to it. If he has perished there, whatever be the errand that took him—it is the best fate that could befall him. Yes, Hesbia, and he I speak of is my only sister's son!"

"Do be merciful, papa," she urged, with clasped hands, and eyes full of tears.

"Misfortunes, especially commercial ones, never come singly, Hesbia," said Vere, resuming his old habit of jingling his loose silver, which he did now with angry energy. "I have had some awkward affairs to settle in Liverpool, and if these coal mines are totally destroyed—I—I know not what may be the result."

"How, dear papa?"

"I have sunk so much money in them, and trusted to their resources, perhaps too much," he added, lowering his voice.

The sleek expression of his face changed for a moment, a glare came into his light-coloured eyes, and then they seemed to pale out almost to extinction, and he looked old and unpleasant.

"Dearest papa," said Hesbia, caressing him; "I am truly grieved to see you look so worried. Tell me, how long do you propose to stay here?"

"Not long; I can promise you that, Hesbia," he replied, snappishly.

"Then you—you——"

"Return to Liverpool to-night, and you go with me."

"To-night—so soon? And—and—and poor men in the mine!"

"I can do nothing. Dead or alive, the fellows, I suppose, can be found without *my* assistance. Bother the men!—Some drunken wretch among them has unlocked his lamp and done all this ruinous mischief; and then come the clamours of their families to madden me, quite as much as the threatened actions for damages. I'll hear all about the affair at home, through the papers or otherwise, soon enough. I have enough—and more than enough—to attend to at the counting-house, and home we shall go," he added, emphatically, looking at his watch, "by the 4 p.m. train this evening. So please to have the whole place shut up at once, and left as before to the care of the gardener and his wife."

Though an only daughter, Hesbia knew that her father was not one who brooked either trifling or delay; so with a

sigh, for she would fain have lingered a few days longer to learn the last and worst, she was preparing to obey him, when Mr. Cheyne was announced, and he came in, hat and whip in hand, and with his spurs and spatterdashes on.

Bluff, jolly, weather-beaten Ranald Cheyne looked pale and weary now; all night long he had been hovering about the scene of the recent catastrophe; his smiles were gone, and the wrinkles in his face were deeper. He was a kind-hearted, plain and honest old country gentleman, and the sight of so many poor women and children in grief and terror had quite unmanned him. He shook hands with Miss Vere and her father in silence, seated himself ere he could be invited to do so, and drew a long sigh.

"I heard of your arrival, Vere, and just rode over to see if I could be of any assistance."

"Thank you, 'tis very kind, I'm sure."

"An awful business this," said Cheyne, after a pause.

"Shocking!" exclaimed Vere.

"The loss——"

"Of money to me will be serious, I must tell you.'

"Sorry to hear it, sir; sorry to hear it. But it was the loss of *human life* I was about to refer to."

"Ah!"

"I have just come from your pits, Vere. The workers have already reached the bodies, and are rapidly bringing them to 'bank,' as they technically term it. The first pair I saw slung up, all grimy and scorched, and hanging limp and lank in the slings, were a father and son—poor fellows! poor fellows! God rest them!—old Davie Burt and young Colin. I knew them well, and my heart felt ready to burst when the women of the village closed shrieking round them, and Frank Feverley—who, like a brave good fellow, is working there in his shirt-sleeves—declared that both were dead, and must have been so for some hours."

"What followed?" asked Vere, coldly.

"What *could* follow? They were coffined at the pit-mouth, carried home, and laid side by side in their little cottage at the Kaims."

Hesbia wept freely, and Mr. Cheyne sat eyeing Mr. Vere with a curious expression, while tapping his strong white teeth with the loaded handle of his hunting-whip.

"My girls, Flora and her sister," he resumed, "with many other ladies, are among the people in the village, to be of service, if they can. Miss Vere remained at the pit last night till I literally forced her home; and now *we* must do something, Vere. The people about the place are mar-

velling much why you are not there. I think you should come with me, and put a few pounds in your pocket. I am not rich, but I'll give a hundred or so towards the matter, to begin with. Remember, these widows and orphans will all be cast on the highways for food, or the tender mercies of the parochial authorities——"

"If the works are destroyed," hissed Vere through his teeth, closing the sentence, with a covert gleam of rage in his pale eyes.

"Then come with me for an hour or so, my good friend."

"Well, for an hour; but I must leave for Liverpool to-night," said Vare, tossing *Bradshaw* angrily on the table, "and have not much time to spare."

"Papa, should you hear any news of—of——"

"Your precious cousin Travice—eh?" interrupted Vere, with a smile on his lip and much suppressed fury in his eye.

"Ye-es, papa——"

"Or of Lennard Blair," said Ranald Cheyne, kindly, in a low voice, "instant word shall be sent you. Poor young Blair! what would his jolly fox-hunting father—old hard-riding Dick—have thought of this? I'll leave my horse here, and we shall walk over to the pits together."

"I cannot be of the slightest service," grumbled Mr. Vere, as Maxwell brought him his hat and gloves; "I hate all scenes, especially those of sorrow. Have luncheon—game-pie and devilled turkey—an early dinner prepared, for I hope Mr. Cheyne will join us. Then we'll be off by the 4 p.m. train, remember."

And as they retired, Hesbia buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly, not the less so that her father seemed so heartless as to excite quietly the very decided contempt of Ranald Cheyne of the Haughs.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOPELESS.

On arriving at the Kaims, they found that the underground manager, the oversman, and some fifteen or twenty miners —all more or less suffering from asphyxia, from scorching, broken bones, bruises, or shocks of the nervous system, but none in imminent danger—had been dug out, slung up, and conveyed to their homes, each of which formed a centre of attraction to the morbid and the curious; so the crowd had greatly lessened, much to Mr. Vere's satisfaction. Several

other men were in the mine, and yet unaccounted for; but expressions of thankfulness that the loss of life had not been so great now took the place of those wild ravings of grief heard before.

Feverley had his hands full; but many medical men from other villages were humanely and charitably ariving in haste, and Vere thought with rage, almost consternation, of all the bills he might have to pay.

"All that have been brought to bank are miners, I presume, Doctor?" said he.

"All," replied Feverley, sorrowfully.

"Have not the explorers seen any trace of Blair or of Cheatwood?"

"None—none," replied the Doctor, with growing emotion. "More than eighteen hours have elapsed, Mr. Vere, since the event, and some parts of the mine are still on fire; elsewhere the choke-damp, which always follows an explosion, proves death to all who inhale it. Poor Blair! I have no hope!"

"I leave by the afternoon train for Liverpool——"

"So soon!"

"Business, Doctor."

"But there will be so much to be looked after here."

"Imperative business requires me elsewhere; but you'll telegraph to me the result of the final exploration."

"There comes a signal from below; some one else has been found!" exclaimed Feverley, as a bell was heard to ring in the engine-house. Then the wheels began to revolve, and the great rope in the centre of the shaft to glide steadily upward, while all who were about the verge drew nearer; every voice was hushed in expectation, every eye bent more eagerly and wistfully on the round yawning mouth, the dark and deep uncertainty of which made the heart recoil; and a long-drawn "Ah!" or a sound like a sigh of expectation rather than relief, escaped from all, as the rusty iron roof of the cage or basket rose into the sunny air, with four miners standing erect therein, and grasping its sides to steady themselves. The grime that coated them hid the pallor of their faces, but their eyes were wild and bewildered in expression, for they had been half-poisoned by the polluted air below.

"Twa mair corpses to streek!" they exclaimed, huskily, and two human figures, one clutching the other tightly as with a death-grasp, were removed from the cage and laid on the bank in the sunshine.

"Juden Grabbie!" exclaimed several voices, but none of them very sympathizingly.

And who was the other? None recognized his dress,

which was nearly burned to rags, or his figure, or his face ; the latter was black as that of a negro, and all his once fair hair had been scorched off. It was Travice Cheatwood, from whose collar Grabbie's hand had never relaxed even in his last extremity, for that unflinching legal functionary had been partly asphyxiated and partly crushed to death by falling *débris*.

"Keep back the crowd," said Feverley, with an air of authority, to the police. "Grabbie is dead—hopelessly gone; but the other is only senseless, and may rccover ; his pulses are beginning to beat, and already respiration is returning !"

"Who is he ?—who is he ?" asked several eager voices.

"A total stranger ; let him be conveyed at once to my house," said the Doctor, "and I shall attend him there. Mr. Vere," he added, in a whisper, after a rapid examination of the prostrate figure ; "this person so blackened and disfigured is—your nephew !"

"Hush—gracious Heaven—in such a state !"

"He is only suffering from the effect of partial suffocation—there is nct a bone broken, nor even an external injury traceable ; turpentine and the cold douche will soon restore him. By Jove, I begin to have hopes of my poor friend Blair !"

A miner by means of his pocket-knife had to cut away the piece of Cheatwood's collar that was sternly clutched by the dead hand of Grabbie, as if in a vice of steel, ere they could be separated. The body of the dead man was then conveyed to his cottage, at the junction of the two villages, while Travice, still insensible and breathing, only in spasmodic gasps, was placcd on a door tenderly and gently, and borne by rough and toilworn hands to the little dwelling of Feverley, who, by applying electricity to the spinal column and other external stimulants, soon brought him back completely to consciousness.

Among those who saw him borne away and yet failed to recognize him, was his chief source of terror, little Mr. Nathaniel Nab ; but that personage had not his warrant now, and even if, armed with it, he had attempted anything like an arrest, or the enforcement of his office, at that particular juncture, the excited people might have sent him down the shaft without the use of the cage.

Aware of the unscrupulous and clouded character of Cheatwood, and of the legal dangers that hung over him, the Doctor would allow none to have access to the room where he lay, in his medical capacity debarring even the fussy Procurator Fiscal, and other officials. When sufficiently

recovered to bear questioning, he was still unable to explain how the explosion took place, as, in fact, he knew not the full extent of the danger he had inadvertently drawn upon himself and others.

"Mr. Cheatwood," said the Doctor, earnestly, when he thought the proper time had come; "collect yourself, please, and tell me, did you see Lennard Blair in the pit?"

"I saw him but for an instant—at the very time of the explosion—and then—then all became darkness."

"And was that all—anything more?"

"After a time I heard his voice—praying I think—and I spoke to him; but what he said, or what I replied, it is impossible for me to remember. He was blown away by the second explosion; then the earth scemed to fall upon me, and I became senseless. Blair must be dead—oh, yes, he must be dead—dead," continued the patient, with an air of dreamy bewilderment. "I might have made my way to the foot of the shaft," he added, after a time, "but for the horrible clutch of that wretch Grabbie; I could in no way work myself free of his corpse!"

"He is gone to his last account, and the secret of his errand will be buried with him."

"For a time only, Doctor—for a time only," replied Travice, weeping in very weakness and prostration of spirit, after all he had undergone.

"None have recognized you," said the young Doctor, soothingly; "remain here in quietness and safety, until I can get you away. In acting thus, I am only doing what your uncle would wish, and poor Blair would have done, for Miss Vere's sake."

Weak though he was, a grimace distorted the face of Travice at the name of Hesbia, for their last interview, and the discovery of the air-gun, rushed upon his memory. Till that moment he had forgotten it utterly.

On rejoining Mr. Vere, who was lingering in the parlour with old Mrs. Feverley, and feeling intensely bored by her grief for all the suffering around her, the unwearied Doctor proceeded again to the scene of the event.

Eight more men had been brought up dead, either suffocated or grievously scorched and mangled, and were borne away in sheets or blankets, followed by wailing and shrieking women and children (whose bread-winners the poor fellows had been) to their now sorrowing, and from thenceforward, desolate homes.

"Eight more men!" muttered Vere, looking at a list of names which was handed him by the oversman, who had suffered severely in the explosion, and could scarcely stand.

"And all these poor fellows have large families," said Mr. Cheyne, with kind commiseration in his tone and glistening eyes.

"With Grabbie, they make thirteen dead in all. Their friends will make fine capital out of this, if mismanagement can be proved underground," he added sternly, to the faint and shrinking oversman.

"Poor fellows," said Ranald Cheyne; "after long years of toil, it seems hard to perish thus in the battle of life."

"Toil was their inheritance," added Feverley.

"Dead or alive, sir," said the oversman, in a weak voice, "all are now, blessed be God, out of the pit except one——"

"Who had no business there—Mr. Blair!"

"Yes, sir; and I have no hope, for fire is still raging in some of the remote seams, and the adjoining pit is yet in flames."

The cries of those who had been bereaved were now confined to their own humble homes; the last dead body had been slowly, reverently, and affectionately borne away, and now a solemn silence seemed to pervade all the place where there had been so much excitement, bustle, sorrow, and consternation—a silence broken only at times by the ascent and descent of the cage with a fresh party of explorers, searching for the still missing man; and with hearty good will the brave fellows worked, for Lennard Blair was a favourite with all the little community.

Like a solid mountain or landslip by the destruction of the intermediate pillars, the earth had fallen down in many places; torrents of gas issued through fissures of the rocks in others. Ever and anon the foul air drove the baffled diggers in consternation and exhaustion from their task to the bottom of the shaft; then the bell would be rung furiously in the engine-house, and the cage ascended swiftly with its load of gasping miners, their lips baked, and eyes bloodshot; another gang would cheerfully descend, still resolved to push on and explore; but with no better success.

Mr. Vere grew weary of waiting, and frequently consulted his massive gold watch.

"Only two hours to dine and catch the 4 p.m. train!" he muttered; and making his excuses of urgent business, and leaving instructions with Mr. Cheyne and Dr. Feverley to let him have instant news if Blair was found, he hastened away, leaving them both under the very decided conviction that he would not become a prey to grief if that circumstance never took place. And at present Lennard's recovery seemed hopeless—perfectly hopeless!

CHAPTER XL.

SIR CULLENDER ON THE TAPIS.

To Hesbia the departure from Blairavon station seemed somewhat of a dream ; and to one less sensational—perhaps less artificial—leaving at such a juncture would have been a more acute and protracted agony. The active Maxwell had "seen" to all their luggage, rugs, &c., and got the tickets for herself and Mr. Vere, with second-class ditto for their entire staff, the third-class of the Scotch lines being so proverbially wretched that the butler and his companions "couldn't abear 'em."

In the same carriage with the domestics went little Mr. Nathaniel Nab, who had strange stories to tell to his brethren of the Liverpool force, concerning his brief sojourn north of Tweed.

Aware that Hesbia would rather be without the annoyance of strangers at present, Mr. Vere had desired Maxwell to secure the coupé of a first-class carriage for them, and she felt very grateful for this little piece of forethought and attention.

Swiftly went the train, shrieking, whistling, thundering, and smoking along the line ; now through echoing tunnels, or along green bankings ; and anon past cuttings, where the summer grass had withered or been scorched away by sparks from the engine ; and Hesbia's face grew sadder, her eyes more full of tears, and her heart more yearning after the place and the lover she had left behind. But the scene changed fast as the express train swept over the moorlands that border on Glengonar's "ore-stained stream ;" by the Moffat hills, that tower above the Scottish Cheltenham ; past Lockerbie, and on through lovely and fertile Annandale, on the green braes of which the last rays of the setting sun were falling.

Ere leaving, fain would Hesbia have visited the cottage of Dr. Feverley, and questioned Travice Cheatwood as to what had passed between him and Lennard Blair in the coal-mine, and what he had said—his last words, too, probably—perhaps a message to herself ; but her father had not permitted her to go near her cousin, so the inquiry was never made. Though silent on the subject, she felt all the heartlessness implied by Mr. Vere leaving while the tragic fate of their friend was undecided. She could but hope that the journey southward—flight, it almost seemed—was really caused by press of business ; but still she had her *doubts*.

Yesterday she had been picturing her return per rail with Travice; her tender adieux to Lennard, and she had been endeavouring to frame the probable speeches in which he was so soon to break the subject of their engagement to her father; she had been thinking even of the fashion and the trimmings of her wedding dress; of who should be her bridesmaids—the Cheynes, certainly, for two—of who should be invited "if papa consented;" and so forth. But now——!

Behind the thick screen of her tied Shetland veil her tears could fall unseen; and so the pair travelled far in silence, her papa immersed apparently in the *Times* city article, while she affected to be busy with her crotchet work. Lennard was dead, she could scarcely doubt now, and she who loved him so, dared not put on even a black ribbon in honour of his memory, for their engagement had been a secret one; and ere long she was to learn that his death would be the only small feature in the whole calamity taken from her father's point of view.

She was so full of her own thoughts that, amid the monotonous hum and other noises of the train, she had not been aware of Mr. Vere addressing her, till he suddenly raised his voice, and said angrily—

"Can you not put that stupid crochet aside for a moment, and listen to me?"

"Yes, papa; but wait till I am at the end of my row, please."

"Why?"

"Because if I lose my place——"

"What matter if you do?" he asked sharply.

"It is so difficult to find it again."

"I was talking to you of young Blair, but you are not attending to me."

"Pardon me, papa; but I did not hear you," said she, becoming all attention; "poor, poor Lennard Blair! You were saying——"

"That though he was about as well born as ourselves, Hesbia, the lad was poor."

Hesbia shuddered, for she knew that her father was indulging in a sneer.

"Poor? perhaps so, but he was strictly honourable—a gentleman in every sense, papa."

"True; there is a play which says that 'honest men are the gentlemen of nature;' he *was* open, generous, and, as you say, strictly honourable, otherwise we should never have employed him."

Hesbia shuddered again. It seemed so strange, so terrible, to be speaking of him already in the past tense.

"But though poor and my dependent, he considered himself more than my equal in some respects—quite a patrician, in fact, for he inherited all his stupid old father's nonsensical ideas," continued Mr. Vere, who seemed to be talking or working himself into a fit of ill-humour; "and I *hate* your patricians or aristocrats—they are all so preciously cold-blooded."

"But they are usually courteous, papa," urged Hesbia, "while plebeians may be equally cold-blooded, and are often coarse and brutal. But, talking of patricians, do you consider your friend Sir Cullender one?"

"Yes—by birth unquestionably; but then he has been a man of business, of utility, and common sense; a successful speculator, and the architect of his own fortune. By the way, he has written to you since he left for London, I believe?"

"Yes, papa."

"How often?"

"Twice, I think."

"Twice only?"

"Yes," replied Hesbia, curtly, with annoyance, for she was in no mood to brook much about Sir Cullender just then.

"And what did his last letter contain?"

"Merely an absurd photograph."

"Why absurd?"

"It was of himself, and his hooked nose, black, gleaming eyes, and pale, unhealthy-looking complexion were all most severely reproduced."

"And was this portrait all?"

"I think so," replied Hesbia, colouring behind her veil with pure annoyance and vexation, for an offer of marriage was pretty pointedly made in the letter referred to, and it was evident that Mr. Vere knew and approved of it.

Following up his own ideas, his suspicions, or actual knowledge, after a few minutes' unpleasant silence, he said, somewhat markedly and bluntly,—

"Do not let us misunderstand each other, Hesbia, or even pretend to do so. It is as well for all concerned that this lad Blair is gone."

"Dearest papa, do not say so!"

"I have other, better, and brighter views for you, and so let there be no more, now and for ever, of this Lennard Blair," said he gravely, almost sternly. "I have permitted too much intimacy, and ought to have seen it as others have done—one especially."

"One—who?" asked Hesbia, looking up.

"Sir Cullender Crowdy."

"Oh, papa! a man as absurd in appearance as in name," said Hesbia, with something of asperity in her tone.

"If our firm become insecure—in the mercantile world we can never see very far before us now-a-days—if our firm were to fail, I say, how would it fare with Lennard Blair?"

"I do not comprehend you, papa."

"Have you no dread of poverty?"

"Oh yes!—a horror of it; that is—but I never thought—cannot anticipate such a thing."

Mr. Vere looked gloomy, for he had his own ideas and secret fears.

"If poor Mr. Blair is really dead," began Hesbia, with a soft chord in her voice and a sob in her throat, "if he has indeed passed away——"

"Then his share in the business, such as it is, falls to the firm entirely."

This was not what Hesbia was about to refer to; but now something of mocking duplicity in her father's tone and eye were so apparent that she felt shocked. She had a fear that Lennard had been duped, and yet she knew not why or how.

"Papa must have injured him in some manner—else whence this coldness about his fate—a coldness amounting almost to dislike?" she asked herself.

"But, papa," she resumed, "surely *you* can never become poor, whatever happens. Even if your business failed, you have the estate of Blairavon, with all those mines of coal—"

"You know not what you talk of, Hesbia: and as for these pits, I have for the present utterly lost them, with all the plant and rolling-stock underground, by that horrible catastrophe, which may render them unworkable for years, if ever again, for the fire is still unconquered." After this, he fussily reopened the *Times*, and relapsed into silence, leaving his daughter a prey to thoughts more than ever gloomy and depressing.

CHAPTER XLI.

ENTOMBED ALIVE.

More than an hour perhaps had elapsed after the explosion, before Lennard Blair became conscious that he was still living, and so far as he knew, alone in the mine—or alone with the dead; and then rushed upon his mind the awful sense of being buried and abandoned; alone, without even

the sad communion of others in suffering! There rose in his heart a terrible emotion, with a wild beating; life seemed to be only a spirit of agony, and a cold perspiration trickled over him! He heard not a sound, and all was darkness—a great and opaque darkness, which seemed as if it would be for ever between him and the sunshine. He had been blown into some portion of the workings in the mine unknown to him, and though he had not suffered any serious injury, the poisonous after-damp had cast him into a state of insensibility which, with some less tenacious of life, had already ended in the last fatal sleep. How long he had lain on the damp floor of the mine he knew not, for day and night were alike where time seemed to stand still.

Was it midnight now, with the diamond stars and the yellow harvest moon looking down on the quiet woods and the great solemn hills? Or was it the next morning, with the bright sun shining cheerily on the waving corn-fields, the tossing foliage, and the green meadows, which were more than two hundred feet above him? He had his watch, but amid that density of gloom it was useless as a pebble or stone.

His first idea was to seek the bottom of the shaft, but he knew not which way to turn, and in groping about seemed to find himself obstructed on every side by fallen masses of soft earth, or piles of coal, stones, or slag, and more than once he stumbled over a dead pony, or that which with a shudder he knew to be the corpse of a miner. He tried to pray; but at that moment the extremity of horror had put even prayer to flight! He could consider nothing with coherence, yet seemed to think of everything past, present, and to come, in a chaos of reflection.

The last human faces he had seen, ere they vanished amid a whirlwind of flame, smoke, and sable dust—seen in that moment of terror when the uncovered lamp set the air on fire—were filled with grief, care, and dismay. Grief and care for wives and little ones they never might see, and dismay at their own sudden proximity to a terrible death. In his half fatuous wanderings, he trod upon a body which had still some life left in it; for he heard a piteous exclamation in a voice that was familiar.

"Travice Cheatwood!" he called aloud, for the sufferer was certainly Travice. To speak to him of his past imprudence then, would have been worse than useless, so he asked, "Are you injured in any way?"

"Who speaks?" inquired the other, groaning heavily.

"I—Lennard Blair."

"God help us! can it be that you and I are the only survivors here?"

"It would seem so. Let us help each other."

"Speak again, Blair; I am half stupefied."

"Can you stand up?"

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

"My lower limbs are buried under a mass of earth, and stones also, I believe; and the hand of that reptile, Grabbie, is still grasping me with the clutch of a tiger, so my situation is anything but rosy."

"Bid him let you go."

"I have done so repeatedly, but receive no reply; so whether he is dead or alive I cannot say, for the earth is partly over him too."

Cheatwood again moaned heavily, and then said,—

"You know, Blair, that my poor mother was John Vere's only sister."

"Well, what of that now?"

"I lost her when I was an infant. Had she lived, I might not have become the pitiless and pitiful scamp I am!"

"We generally make ourselves, Cheatwood, by our own actions and deeds," replied Lennard, a little touched by the new tone of compunction or repentance adopted by the other in his desperate extremity.

"I am certain that had my poor mother lived," he resumed, "I had been differently guided in youth and advised in manhood, and might not have been dying here to-night amid this horror and misery!"

"Let us put our trust in God, Travice. He is ever kinder to us than we are to ourselves or to each other."

Then Lennard heard him sobbing heavily in the dark. Groping about, he was attempting to yield him some assistance, and endeavour to drag him from under the superincumbent load of earth that weighed him down, when lo! there came another roar that shook the most remote galleries of the mine, and a momentary flash that illumined them with a lurid glare; then a rush of poisonous air came past, and, while instinctively covering his mouth and nostrils, Lennard felt himself swept away before it for some thirty or forty yards. There again he sank down overcome by the dreadful and suffocating odours of the atmosphere, and then for some time he slept heavily.

After that slumber passed away, he continued to lie where he had fallen, half asphyxiated and in a state of semi-stupor. Sounds there were none, and while he felt

himself, as it were, *listening* to the silence, a dull sense of unconsciousness mingling with a strange idea of still life came over him. Already it seemed as if the world of mortal life—the upper world wherein men lived and moved—was gliding away from him, and that the angel of Death was pointing to that which was to come; to judgment and eternity—*eternity*, the "pleasing dreadful thought" of Cato. He was now entombed, he thought, until the resurrection—buried deep among the fossils of ages long since passed away.

When he did attempt to rouse his energies, it was only to become a prey to vivid and horrid thoughts. There was a dull and seemingly distant roaring in his ears which he could not understand, but it proceeded from a more remote portion of the pit then in flames; and though he knew it not, it was a fortunate circumstance that he was so far from the principal shaft, up which at that moment a volume of fire was ascending like a crimson column into the midnight sky. Staggering and groping about he seemed to spend hours of hopeless and futile wandering among the tortuous galleries, cuttings, and seams of the pit. Twice or thrice he raised his voice and uttered a loud hallo; but the sound, as the reverberating echoes alone returned it, appalled him.

It was lucky, too, that while wandering thus, he was not far from the air-road, and hence the greater purity of the atmosphere enabled him to think and act with coherence. He had been asleep and long overpowered, he believed, by the gaseous exhalations elsewhere; but how long? In his confusion of ideas, he knew not whether days and nights, or a week, had elapsed since the first explosion.

How long, long ago it seemed since the discovery of the air-gun and all the other episodes in connection with Travice. It had been yesterday—only yesterday since then—and yet a lifetime seemed to have passed away. Would Hesbia ever know of his fate? Had the time come and gone when he was to have met her at the stile, or had days intervened, and she taken her departure for Liverpool? He was very ingenious in tormenting himself. How long would she mourn for him, and when her period of sorrow was past, whom would she marry? The pale face, the black gleaming eyes and cadaverous, unhealthy, and almost diabolical visage of Sir Cullender seemed to come out of the solid darkness, and to mock, leer, and jabber at him in answer to the question!

Seated there on a heap of earth and slag amid the intense gloom, with his aching head resting between his tremulous hands, and his elbows placed on his knees, he

would have doubted his own identity and almost his existence at times, but for the pangs of stinging thirst, and the thoughts that well nigh drove him mad; yet strange it was, that as he sat there in his state of sudden and most unlooked-for misery, absurd scraps of street songs and melodies, with the roar of Liverpool, seemed to hover in his ears. Light, air, and sunshine—balmy spring, with its hopes of rosy summer and brown autumn; jolly winter, with its hopes of spring again—what were they now to him, when Hesbia, life and all were lost for ever?

There time, as we have said, stood still, and, with him, existence was reduced to a mere system of loud pulsations; for his overcharged heart beat painfully. Wild ideas of quaint hobgoblins, of devouring rats, and of cold, creeping things occurred to him, and he fancied himself in his grave —a grave two hundred feet below the upper soil, so deep that the sound of the last trumpet alone could pierce to where his ashes lay.

Among other horrid thoughts, he feared he might die mad, or that water might be turned into the mine; and though he was perishing of thirst, the idea of being drowned in the dark made him shudder and start convulsively. Would he be the last to perish, or had others been rescued and he left? He had heard of persons shut up in a mine, contriving to live for months by eating their horses and shoes, while striving to dig their way *upward*—living long after those above had abandoned them as lost, working and toiling upward with spade and mattock—but in vain, to perish at last, one by one, when the last morsel was consumed, and the last brave man's heart failed him; and all this was gathered by the position of their remains, when their memory had become a tradition of the Black country, and a future generation re-opened the place.

But he was without companionship, save the dead, and he strove to remember the prayers that Elsie had taught him in childhood, and amid the loud beating of his pulses to trust in a belief that "whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." A Great Hand was over him there as well as elsewhere; yet he felt it hard to perish thus, unseen, unknown, unaided, and so young too!

"We are an unfortunate race!" he muttered; "but how little could my poor father or my dear mother have foreseen such a fearful fate as this for me! Was it for such, to die *under* and not on the lands of Blairavon, I so superstitiously retained the Charter-stone. Even Hesbia—to

save whom from further affronts I ventured here—can never know my doom—my sufferings; and how long will *they* last till the end—the awful end—arrives! Oh, how much worse than death is life while lingering thus!"

As from a long dreamy sleep, he appeared to waken with a start, on seeing at a distance—afar off it seemed—a ray of light shining, and he rose to make his way towards it. Men were there, too, evidently working, for he could hear their excited voices and the ring of their shovels. But now the throbbing of his temples amounted almost to agony; the light and the darkness swam around him; sense seemed finally departing; a great feebleness came over his recently wounded limb; all his strength appeared to pass out of him, and in his despair of being left to perish unseen, a wild cry escaped him, as he staggered forward and fell again insensible on the floor of the mine.

CHAPTER XLII.

SUNSHINE AND CLOUD.

After all he had undergone for full thirty-six hours in the mine—prior to his rescue by Feverley in person with a party of volunteers, and being revived by a timely jorum of brandy from a flask with which they were provided—Lennard's body seemed to come to life, if such a phrase may be permitted, before his mind. The actual consciousness of all he had undergone, with a sensibility of real deliverance therefrom and of safety, only came fully over him when he found himself once more in his own room at Oakwoodlee, and surrounded by faces and objects with which he was familiar.

Next forenoon, lounging at full length upon a sofa, which Elsie and Steinie had drawn close to an open window—for it seemed to Lennard that now he could never inhale enough of pure air—he lay in all the easy comfort of a soft dressing-gown and cosy slippers, while the breeze without swayed the blinds, the faded leaves and few flowers of the window-creepers, and the dark green ivy that coated the old walls, the buzz of the flies in the sunshine, and the lowing of cattle in the distance coming ever and anon pleasantly to his ear, with the murmur of the flowing Avon. Was he the same being who but some twelve hours before lay dying amid the poisonous atmosphere and gloomy darkness of yonder subterranean pit, over which a dark cloud of fiery dust was now hovering like a pall? for the fatal mines had been on fire again, and were then aflame through all their most remote intricacies; so death had been close to him, indeed.

"Well, old fellow," said the cheerful voice of Feverley, who appeared at the window; "how are you this morning —eh?"

"Better, better—thanks to God's kindness and to you! How can I ever repay you, Frank, for the succour you brought me—how repay you?"

"By saying nothing about it," replied the Doctor, fixing his eyes on his watch, while laying a finger on Blair's wrist.

"Pulse regular already—a trifle low perhaps; but you are making a wonderful recovery, for your symptoms were like those of paralysis, with a tendency to the comatose state, but electricity and the cold douche have restored you; so just make your mind easy, my friend, and don't bother yourself about anything—I'll look in again in the evening."

"One word ere you go, Feverley,—so Miss Vere actually returned to Liverpool while knowing that I was yet in the mine?"

"There you begin to worry yourself already!"

"Answer me, please."

"Well, I suppose she knew; but she was not quite a free agent."

"How so—who was with her?"

"Her father; he conveyed her away, saying that the press of business at home was enormous."

"Indeed! and from a combination of events here have I been since May, and the crops that were green or sprouting then are yellow and ready for the reaper now. How sweet the sunshine is! Well, Feverley, I never thought to hear the voice of a bird or the hum of a bee again!"

"You won't hear much of either, I fancy, at this season, unless among the rooks in the old trees yonder."

"Well, there are the glorious blue sky, the pure air—the fragrance of the leaves and the clover. I shall never forget the hours spent in the mine—the poisonous air, the gloomy blackness, and that kind of unbroken stillness which a writer describes as 'the most awful thing in nature.'"

"All that is past and over, so think of it no more. A week or two must see you at the desk again; and now good-bye—my hands are full enough this morning, I can tell you, and ere long the Sheriff and other folks in office will be worrying you by a visit to make a deposition of all you know of this affair."

Though "past and over," Lennard was haunted long by the memory of all he had undergone, and by nervous starts in the night, when he would waken with his old emotion of horror from a dream that he was again in the pit!

In the Scotch papers Mr. Vere read long and amply detailed reports of the whole catastrophe prepared by the useful Mr. Dabchick, who had gone expressly to the spot, being one of the reporting staff of a "penny daily," and as such was fully resolved to make the most of it per column. He also learned from this source that the entire pits had fired again, and that their total destruction was in rapid progress! Telegrams and then letters from Feverley informed him and Hesbia of Lennard Blair's escape and safety, and that he was almost well. Ere long a letter from the latter confirmed all this, so with a clear conscience Hesbia could visit her circle of friends and receive at her father's luxurious villa a round of visitors who welcomed her return home.

From his impaired constitution and dissipated habits, Travice Cheatwood was longer in recovering than Blair; but there was a pressing necessity for him quitting the neighbourhood as soon as possible, for on the second day of his convalescence Feverley entered his room with some concern visible in his manner.

"Mr. Cheatwood," said he, "I find that the Procurator Fiscal insists upon visiting you, as he has examined all the other survivors as to the source of the accident, for whether it was the result of gross carelessness, of malicious design, or natural causes beyond human control, must be fully proved for the satisfaction of the public."

Travice consigned the entire British public to a very warm latitude, and then added—

"But on seeing me, this fellow will discover who I am!"

"Of course; and we all know that will never do."

"I must remain *incog.*; he comes, when do you say?"

"To-morrow, at twelve o'clock."

"So soon?"

"Yes."

"Then to-morrow before daybreak I shall cease to trouble your hospitable household, Doctor, and be off."

"Exactly. Blair suggested that I should drive you in a gig over to the Craigellon station, and book you there for Glasgow, where you must ship for abroad."

"To ship for abroad requires money, and I have none," grumbled Travice; "I spent as bribes or lost every fraction of what I had in that most accursed coal-pit."

"And your hopes of more——"

"Are blank as my banker's book."

"And you have nothing——"

"Save a piece of land—a very small piece, certainly."

"Indeed?" said Feverley, all unaware that the other was bantering and sneering at Fate.

"I can give you a *post obit* right to it."

"Is it large?"

"Small, I told you—in some churchyard—place unknown as yet."

"Stop, Cheatwood," said Feverley; "I don't like this style of jest. Blair has sent you thirty pounds—use the money with discretion."

"Blair is a jolly good fellow after all."

"He is one of Nature's noblemen!" exclaimed the Doctor, emphatically; "and it was to save you if he could, and the Veres from disgrace, that he so nearly lost his life."

"I'm a luckless devil, Doctor! All this sort of thing comes of living fast—'not too wisely, but too well.' I'll turn over a new leaf some of these days; but like the 'old gentleman' in the couplet, I have often been a monk when sick, and a devil when well. I am well now, and so shall sedulously avoid all examination by your Procurator Fiscal or that bumptious little pettifogger Dabchick, and all other legal and scientific snobs in the matter of the explosion. By Jove, I think I've had quite enough of it!" added Cheatwood, his natural sauciness and brusquerie returning with health, as he slipped Lennard's thirty pounds into his pocket with perfect satisfaction.

Closely shaven of his hirsute appendages, and supplied with a suit of clothes and a pair of dark moustachios erst worn by Feverley at amateur theatricals in his student days, even Juden Grabbie would have failed to recognise Cheatwood, especially in the twilight of the dark autumnal morning when he was driven away from a locality which he now loathed. His disappearance caused serious suspicions to exist that he was an incendiary, and hence the good-natured young Doctor was subjected to many legal "precognitions" and much annoyance; but Lennard was enabled in a day or two to acquaint Hesbia in distinct terms that he had sought the pit on that most fatal night to avert, if he possibly could, the contumely that would be consequent to the arrest of her enterprising cousin; that he had, by monetary assistance, been able to save him in the end; and that through the instrumentality of Feverley, he—the luckless Travice—had been sent to the nearest port, and doubtless now was far beyond the sea; and in reply Lennard received a warm and tender—yet he thought somewhat short—letter of thanks.

Oakwoodlee was no longer his—he was actually a visitor there now! He had no object in remaining but to get well and strong, and to kill the lagging time till he could follow her to Liverpool; and when able to walk abroad he loved

to linger in those places where they had wandered together; and by association these spots always brought her voice, her laugh and smile more vividly to memory; and so would he dream the sunny days away, recalling how she had looked in her smart hat and feather when she sat on that mossy bank, her pretty balmorals and ankles just visible under the skirt of her piquet; there she culled a bouquet of wild flowers, and in yonder pool she had dipped her round white hand while vainly seeking to catch a fleeting trout. Her letters were his only solace; tender at first, and daily almost like his own; but they speedily became less frequent, for no doubt she was immersed in a round of gaieties; and now, as they came at longer intervals, he thought them less tender in tone, and she seemed always to close "in haste to catch the post."

Little fears began to wake within him, making him long more than ever to be gone; and in spite of the advice of Feverley (who would not yet permit him to travel) he daily taxed, rather than developed his health. A letter from Mr. Vere urged him to prepare at once to start for Vera Cruz, where he must have an interview with Don Juan Leonardo and Co., who held certain papers relating to the alleged scuttling of a ship upon the high seas. "Your passage," he added, "is secured and paid for, on board the *Valparaiso*, mail steamer, which sails from Liverpool on Wednesday, the 24th current."

"Wednesday the 24th—and this is Saturday!" exclaimed Lennard, as he sprung to his feet; "this is conclusive; this, then, is a fixity!"

So permission was at last accorded by his medical friend for his departure, when he was to bid a short—or perhaps it might prove a long and lasting adieu to Blairavon and to Oakwoodlee; and now, he knew not why, he was full of sad, almost of foreboding thoughts, as he wandered forth alone when the evening sun was shining on the heath-clad hills, and the brown autumn woods looked almost red or russet in the western glow.

Though young Lennard was still old enough to feel or to understand that emotion which has been aptly described as "the *superstition* of the heart, which gathers round accustomed relics, making household gods of them and shrinking painfully from their displacement by an unthinking stranger's touch." So all that remained of his father's household lares, and all of his other possessions were to pass to strangers now—all save the Charter-stone; and on this evening in particular, he felt a melancholy satisfaction that he

had obeyed the quaint wishes of the dying in retaining the somewhat useless proprietary of it. Grim and weather-beaten as when the painted Pictish warriors and stern Druid priests had knelt around it in the worship of Woden, Thor, and Frei, stood up the rough palladium amid its grove of Scottish pines; bronzed and red-stemmed they bristled against the ruddy sun-set, and seemed to exhale a peculiar fragrance on the evening air; while the rabbits and hares shot swiftly to and fro among the long rank grass and the fallen fir cones.

Lennard ascended the slope of the hills to take a farewell view of the rich landscape that for leagues upon leagues stretched far away, clad in red, in russet, and in golden brown, the lovely tints of the Scottish woods in autumn—all the lovelier that in many places the bright green lingers still. And he thought of the days when his father and Ranald Cheyne used to draw the covers there, or pot and bag the grouse in August, and the blackcocks in November not with percussion locks and breech-loaders, but double-barrelled Joe Mantons; and so on he wandered until he reached the summit of Craigellon, with its deep loch, evidently an extinct crater, and when he thought of his uncle Lennard whom he had never seen, the lines of Bryant seemed appropriate to the spot:—

> "There is a tale about these gray old rocks,
> A sad tradition of unhappy love,
> And sorrows borne and *ended* long ago!"

This was Lennard's last Sunday in the home of his boyhood and infancy; and as he lay on the green slope of the hill (of old the Piper's Croft) with the last of the mountain bees humming drowsily around him, and the leafy rustle of the pleasant woods in his ear, the tolling of the village church bell came at intervals on the passing wind. It was a familiar sound, like that of a friendly voice, and was associated with his earliest years.

He was about to rejoin (for a brief space, indeed!)—her he loved, she who had sat by his side when he sat last on that very spot; yet his heart was not without sadness, for the final time we look on a long familiar scene, or hear a long familiar voice, while knowing that we may never see one nor hear the other more, cannot fail to produce a solemn emotion in a reflecting mind.

On the next Sunday eve, when that old bell was tolling at the same hour, and summoning the same people to prayer, he would be far away; on the following weekly festival he

would be further still—out on the open sea; and many months, and even years, must inevitably come and go, and much that was of vital importance to his future life must have been decided and past; many a doubt must have been solaced, many a fear soothed, and many a difficulty surmounted, ere *again*—if ever—he heard that old, old bell booming in the distant tower!

Then he thought, almost with a cynic's smile, where were *now* the doubts, the fears, the joys and sorrows of the past generations which slept under the green turf, whereon the shadow of that village spire was cast by the setting sun, now, as in the evenings of seven centuries ago? For around that fane generations had been born; within it they had worshipped; there they had been wedded, and in the end been gathered to their kindred dust after a life spent in the narrow world that was bounded by their native hills; and still the old church stands on its holy knoll—God's Acre—the landmark of the rural district now, even as it was when raised by a certain Scottish knight, Sir Baldwin of Strathbroc and Almondale, who had been grievously wounded by an English arrow at the battle of Northallerton. Deep in his thigh had sunk the fatal barb, and all the leech-croft of those primitive days when St. David I. reigned in Scotland failed to extract it; so for years the knight who had become a Brother of St. John, and a hermit by Lochness, was lame and enduring torment. Yet he made pilgrimages afoot, say the legendaries, to every church that was dedicated to the blessed Virgin, imploring her intercession, and as the ballad has it:—

"Far, far he rade, and far he gaed,
He often sailéd the sea,
And crosséd owre the Alpine hills
To distant Italie.
Beyond Lochnesse his Tempill stoode,
A cell of mickle fame;
A knicht of gude Sanct Johne he was,
And Baldwin was his name."

Once he vowed that, if cured of his wound, he would found a church in honour of Our Lady on the *blair*, or open field beside the Avon; and then even while he vowed and prayed, he felt the corroding iron pass forth from his limb; not a trace of the wound could be found, and he became a hale man and strong. Thereafter in fulfilment of his vow, for the health of his own soul, the souls of all his ancestors, and of David, then King of the Scots, he founded Mary's Kirk upon the knoll, where, four hundred years after, an

ancestor of Lennard's contrived to save it from total demolition amid the general chaos of the Reformation.

But ere the church was finished, Sir Baldwin, with the cross upon his breast and shoulder, had departed in company with other Scottish Brethren of his Order to close their days in defence of the holy sepulchre, and he fell in a conflict in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Still true to his adoration of the Mother of God, continue the legendaries, as he was expiring he cried—

"Hail, O Mary, Mother of mercy!"

Then there appeared by his side a beautiful lady over whose face there was a wondrous brightness; she had shining white raiment, flowing tresses of gold, and around her head shone a glory studded with thirteen stars. Then the dying crusader knew that he beheld that Mother Mary unto whom he had prayed so often, and he passed away in rapture with his head upon her arm. So Baldwin of Strathbroc and Almondale, found his last home beside the brook of Kedron.

While Lennard was dreaming of those pre-railway times and legends, how fared it with Hesbia in Liverpool? Her letters to him—alas! that we must confess it!—had become markedly cold and strange, and then they—ceased; at least he had received none for several days. Was she ill? Her father's last, his only and most impressive letter concerning the journey to Vera Cruz, made no mention of her. Painful doubts began to rise in Lennard's mind. He strove to keep them under; but they would recur again and again with growing poignancy. However, with the morrow's journey, he hoped to solve them all, and while he is making his final arrangements, therefore, we must leave him for another chapter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SELF.

"ANOTHER letter from that young man Blair, and for *you*, Hesbia?" said Mr. Vere, in a tone of angry inquiry, selecting the missive in question from the heap of letters, notes, and papers which the butler emptied at his elbow from the leathern post bag on the breakfast table; and though Mr. Vere had imbibed a most excellent meal, which included coffee and hot muffins, marmalade, ham, bloaters, and eggs, a stormy expression darkened his usually placid face—an expression which grew deeper as he took in at a glance the addresses and postmarks of some of his correspondence.

"Thanks, papa," said Hesbia, colouring slightly as she received the letter, with which her father seemed to part reluctantly. She did not open it, however, but laid it by her cup.

"Thanks!" echoed he, contemptuously, after the butler had withdrawn; "this absurdity must cease!"

"What absurdity, papa?"

"This almost daily correspondence."

"But he has had so much to tell us."

"Well, we have heard that he escaped safely, and Travice too; that he is recovering, and all that sort of thing; that he is coming here, and then going to Vera Cruz, by the *Valparaiso;* so what need, I say, for all this useless correspondence?"

"Papa," said Hesbia, her heart beginning to beat quicker, though the colour left her cheek; "a little time will tell all."

At this pretty plain hint which somehow escaped her unintentionally, Mr. Vere thrust aside his pile of unopened letters, and regarded her gravely.

We have already hinted at losses by sea and otherwise, sustained by the firm of which he was the head; of policies of insurance in dispute, consequent on dark rumours of alleged scuttlings among the West Indian Keys, and off the shores of South America; then came actions at law for damages to widows and orphans under the Mines Inspection Act, and many other involvements resulting from the destruction of his valuable pits at the Mains of Kaims, all of which entanglements had produced a serious effect upon the exchequer of Vere and Co., who were secretly affirmed in Liverpool to be getting "shaky," "fishy," or into shoal water; and nods and winks of deep import were exchanged by knowing clerks and cashiers over their pipes and beer in those little clubs and snuggeries where they were wont to congregate after business hours.

Hesbia saw her father's frown, and knew what was coming. Of late many hints and mysterious or cutting speeches, had prepared her mind to view the cadaverous baronet as an actual suitor for her hand. In fact, by letter, he had openly proposed, and that letter remained as yet unanswered.

On the night of the catastrophe, when Lennard's death was considered a certainty, and on the previous occasion of his suffering and danger, Hesbia's emotions of repentance and grief for many little acts of coldness, duplicity, and coquetry, have been referred to, and her love for him then seemed to become genuine; but now there were moments when in her worry—it did not amount to a melo-dramatic

agony of distress—a feeling of angry selfishness actually filled her heart.

Why should she suffer alone? Why—she thought—be the victim of an impoverished father on one hand, or of a half-penniless lover on the other? Wealth and luxury were necessary to her existence as rain and sunshine to nature; but Lennard Blair could give her neither, and if her father spoke truth, *he* could not continue long to do so; thus on the baronet with the absurd name must centre all her hopes of continuing her present mode of life in splendour and affluence. All these considerations were rushing through her mind, as she sat with her ears tingling, and Lennard's letter unopened in her hand; but now she became aware that her father was speaking again.

"What does all this mean? You are still, I find, in correspondence with Mr. Blair, who in a short time now must sail for South America at last."

"Papa, you know not what you speak of."

"You are polite, Hesbia!"

"I mean, how you rend my heart."

"The very cant of novels and dramas. It cannot be," said Mr. Vere with something of genuine astonishment, "it cannot be, Hesbia, that you have really allowed your heart, as you call it, to be fooled with by that dangler Blair?"

Hesbia was silent; but her eyes were full of tears, and her paleness increased.

"Speak!"

"I do not love Sir Cullender at all events."

"Fool! who asks you to love him? Who pretends that love is necessary on either side? There is money on both—splendid wealth on his, at least, and what more can be necessary?"

"But you did not think thus when you married mamma?"

"Yes—decidedly! Had she not had those fourteen thousand pounds which were of such use to me when I began the world, she had never had the honour of being your mother."

"Oh, papa, how can you talk thus?"

"Sir Cullender is rich; he proposes marriage, and that begins the affair."

"Does it end it?"

"What do you mean, girl?"

"Can any one forcsee the end of a marriage that is made without love?"

"No; but one can very easily foresee the end of one that is made without *money*."

"You are severe on me, papa."

"Hesbia, I am just and sad—yes, and desperate, too, if you could but understand it."

"Desperate?" said she, in a faint voice.

"Sir Cullender has become possessed of several of my acceptances to a great value, and if I cannot meet these and other claims within a month at the latest," he continued, lowering his voice, and glancing about him with a stealthy and cunning eye, "the house of Vere & Co. will inevitably collapse like a paper balloon!"

"But to marry him—*him*—oh, papa," exclaimed Hesbia, her pale lip trembling.

"It must be so—there is no resource for you—for me. Money is wanted imperatively! Our firm has met with many an ugly loss, and I shrink from the investigation of them."

"Yet is not Lennard Blair's errand to Vera Cruz one of scrutiny and research?"

"You do not understand," said he, speaking hurriedly; "the world knows not all yet; but dark whispers are, I know, muttered on 'Change. Sir Cullender can pull us through, and will do so, Hesbia, if you favour his suit."

"So he makes me the price of his pecuniary assistance!" said she, scornfully.

"As the wife of a baronet, Hesbia, you will have many advantages, such as my daughter merely, you could never possess. You will be eligible for the drawing-rooms—for presentation at Court——"

"Has Sir Cullender ever been presented?" asked Hesbia, to whose memory some of Lennard's hints and slighting remarks occurred.

"Well—no—I believe that he has not."

"Why, papa?"

"He cares little for such things, probably; though a man of family, of course—of course—he is thoroughly—a man of business, Sir Cullender."

What a wonderfully magnetic power lurked in the deep hazel eyes of Hesbia! Even her father was sensible of this, when at that moment they were full of mockery, flashing, and magnificent with disdain of the baronet and his so-called passion for her; but the next instant saw them cloud and droop with sorrow for Lennard, and fear for herself—fear lest she should become poor!

"What say you to all I have urged?" asked Mr. Vere, after a long and very uncomfortable pause.

"How can I ever pretend to show a love for this man?"

"To demonstrate much regard before marriage, would be, I presume, unbecoming."

"But I hate, papa—almost hate him."

"Any strong feeling is better than total indifference. Regard will come after marriage. I did not care a doit for your poor mamma before I married her."

Not much after, he might have added, though he gave her a pompous funeral, and a white marble slab; and now this living mass of selfishness was ready to yield up his daughter, even as Jephtha did of old.

"Ah, dearest papa, she urged," with uplifted hands, "can you really ask me to sell myself?"

"No—I do not."

"What then?"

"To save yourself and me from impending ruin—it may be poverty—the most humiliating poverty, in this very place where we have been so honoured—so long looked up to. I ask you, will not such a reverse be intolerable?"

Again those ominous words and that chilling prospect, which in her mind was only associated with seedy and anxious governesses and poor needlewomen, in garrets and places of squalor or of close work-rooms, where for sixteen, or it might be twenty hours out of the twenty-four, she had seen young girls of all ages, making up those elaborate toilettes which were to figure in Rotten Row, the ball-room, or the levees of British Royalty—their cheeks blanched, their eyes listless, temples throbbing, and premature death only as the award of a life of suffering—for such scenes she had beheld, and they haunted her. She looked at her father timidly, and recognised a peculiar expression in his smooth and flabby face, and knew it of old—a species of subdued fury, when he meant to *crush* those who opposed his will; so her tears began to fall. This completed his exasperation, for, sooth to say, he had external matters more than enough to worry him just then, and every letter he tore open and half perused with a malediction on his lips, seemed to add fuel to the flame.

"Begone to your room, girl, and there weep like a child, if you will; but remember that such folly as you have been guilty of, and still persist in, suits not me, and certainly becomes not you!"

And here ended this remarkable conversation.

Hesbia retired to her room, and wept, and pondered, and gazed listlessly at the broad waters of the Mersey, which shone at a distance amid the golden haze of noon—for so long had their conversation lasted. Broken by many a

hedge and fence a vast tract of stubble-fields lay there, with pasture-land of yellowish green, interspersed by autumn woods, and the white sails of the craft that studded the river far above the docks by Dingle Bank and Sefton Street. One moment she thought she would fly with Lennard Blair to South America, to exile and penury, even if their reverse of fortune came to that! But could she ruin her father, selfish though he seemed to be? Then she thought of the splendour and luxury she would lose on one hand, with a make-shift life of prudence, parsimony, and hardship—it might be sordid poverty—on the other; and the result of her pondering was, that there came to be a lapse in her correspondence with Lennard Blair, whose last letter imploring an answer to several sent before was not attended to, and long before he reached Liverpool, the mind of Miss Vere was "made up" as to the course she would pursue—made up irrevocably.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LOST TICKETS.

So the final, or fatal day, as Elsie Graham thought it, came at last, when Lennard Blair was to leave Oakwoodlee; and when she and Steinie were to become the joint tenants of a little cottage which he had taken for them in the village—a dwelling rendered empty by the recent catastrophe.

"Go, Master Lennard, my brave lad!" said Steinie, with confident enthusiasm, as he strapped the portmanteau, rugs, and so forth, in the hall; "go on, and you cannot fail to prosper; though, as we are told, the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; yet—yet, with youth and experience, what may a man not achieve? What brae may he no climb, even were it ten times as steep and high as Kirkyetton Craig?"

Even Steinie was, like Lennard, of a different temperament from his late master, who had been fonder of retracing and falling back upon the past than of boldly facing the *future*.

As a treat for his young master's last dinner at home, poor Steinie Hislop went forth with his rod to whip the old familiar pool for a salmon trout—he was doubtful whether such fish were to be found in English waters—he rather thought not—but whether it was that he was growing dim of sight, or less expert than of old, or that the fish of the Avon preferred those vagrant flies which floated on the

stream to the mimic insects of Steinie's manufacture, we know not, but he came sadly home with his basket empty; so Lennard and Feverley, who took a farewell dinner at Oakwoodlee, had to content them without fish.

"Frank," said the former, as Steinie removed the cloth and lingered a little, after placing, with a wistful expression of eye, the last bottle of the old wine-cellar before him—lingered, as one who would from that hour find his "occupation gone," his old labours at an end; "Feverley, in a combined spirit of vanity, perhaps of sentimental superstition, or what you will, I preserved the proprietary of that old block of stone upon the lea, when I forgot to make quite an adequate provision for these two faithful old servants of my father; but, whatever they may require, you will see to it—you will take care of them, and not fail to draw on me at once?"

The Doctor promised, and filling his glass, drunk to Lennard's pleasant journey, and to his "joyous success at the end of it."

"And now, with regard to this sort of thing," began Lennard, lowering his voice, "I may as well speak now, for I have little time to spare. Your cousin Milly is still a widow——"

"True," said the other curtly, as a flush rose to his temples and then passed away.

"When I come back I shall hope to find you in a better location than yonder little cottage in the village. You understand."

"Poor Milly! I should never have revealed our wretched story."

"Even to me?"

"Not even to you, Lennard; but there are times when, inspired by some strange impulse, the heart uncloses the secret cell wherein lie hidden the thoughts and treasured hopes of years. So, on that night, either some instinct told me that you would sympathize with our sorrowful separation, or the memory of it loaded me; I know not which," said Feverley, sadly.

"And so you poured your story forth."

"Well, such revelations often soothe the human heart, though men may, at after times, repent that sorrow, or wine perhaps, made them so garrulous and communicative."

"But not in you to me, I trust?"

"Ah no! my friend; but do not speak of Milly now, and foster the old hope that can revive no more." But Lennard only laughed at this.

An hour later saw them separated, with all good and kind wishes on both sides, and Feverley waving his hat on the platform of the solitary little station, while fast sped the thundering iron-horse which bore Lennard back to England. He chose the same time and train as when Hesbia went, that he might see the same scenery on which she had looked at the same hour and under the same light, for there is no such day-dreamer as a lover; but, in many points, the varying landscapes were changed even since then. In fields which had been laden with waving grain, the thick green clover was replacing the brown stubble; a shot or two in the distance, and white puffs of smoke among the dark hedgerows, reminded him that pheasant-shooting had begun; the last of the martins had passed away, and the wild duck and the jack-snipe were seen about the marshes and lochs of Lanarkshire.

As the train sped away into the green mountain gorges, an old man and an old woman were lingering on the lower slope of Craigellon, watching the white streaming steam of the locomotive, till it finally melted into thin air, and the sound of the train died away in the distance, when, with slow steps, they sought their new home in the village. They were Elsie Graham and Steinie Hislop, who seemed to stoop more than ever over his staff, and communing in their own fashion, they were marvelling when again they might see the comely face of the lad they loved so well; for to their humble comprehension and localised ideas, Vera Cruz was a genuine *terra incognita*—a land beyond the moon.

"We've seen the last o' him—the last o' *them*—it's a sair, sair wrench!" said Elsie, clasping her hands.

Lennard had many thoughts crowding on his mind, as he lay back in the corner of a well-cushioned first-class carriage and puffed his cigar leisurely and reflectively. Much had happened since last, in the same carriage, perhaps, he had traversed the same line of railroad for the north. He was going away, perhaps finally, from Blairavon and Oakwoodlee (he gave a backward glance, but both the old places had vanished now, and even Craigellon was out of sight), away from the spot where the graves of his father and mother and the most of his kindred lay; he had a long sea-voyage before him; but then he was first going to her—to Hesbia, drawing nearer and more near, at the rate of forty miles an hour. Posts and wires flew past as if they madly ran a race towards the north; yet to the lover how slow seemed the train—a very laggard.

Now it was at Covington, under the giant peak of Tinto

—"the Hill of Fire,"—and by the hamlet where the Covenanters were wont to conceal themselves of old, burying so much treasure that, when an old house is pulled down, specie enough is always found in the walls wherewith to build a new one; now it was at Lamington, with the old castle wherein the mother and daughter of Wallace resided, in the stormy days when "the Hammer of the Scots" won his battle at Dunbar, and the Forth at Stirling bridge ran red with English blood; and now they were among the Lowther hills, the finest of the mountain ranges in pastoral Lanarkshire; but, heedless of the scenery, Lennard was indulging in dreams of his own; he had actually vague ideas of a private marriage, if Mr. Vere refused his consent to a public one,—of solemnly written promises and terrible vows, and all manner of melodramatic *dénouements*, even of asking Hesbia to elope with him to Vera Cruz, if a "flinty-hearted" father drove them to desperation.

Would the train be behind time? He sat with his watch in his hand, and consulted *Bradshaw*, as the sunset declined on the Border hills and the towers of Carlisle; and so on, and on, till erelong they steamed into the crowded station of Preston, where much bustle of changing carriages ensued.

"Twenty minutes' wait here, gentlemen," shouted the guard, or some other official. "Change here!—change carriages for London, Liverpool, Manchester," and many more places were enumerated.

The gas was lighted now, so Lennard sprang forth to have a cup of coffee and another cigar.

Amid the bustle of the platform, the banging of carriage-doors, lighting of lamps for the various night-journeys, bewildered passengers jostling each other in search of their trains, the transference of luggage and goods from various vans and carriage tops, and all the hurly-burly, secret tipping of guards, and intense care of self—the "looking after Number One"—which pervade a railway-station, Lennard prudently buttoned his paletôt over his watch and its appendages, while drawing near a crowd which had gathered round a lady and gentleman with whom the guard and ticket-collector were maintaining an angry argument—angry, at least, on one side; mild and expostulatory on the other.

They appeared to be foreigners, and the lady alone spoke English.

"Jack," shouted the guard, "have you made a thorough search through that Scotch first-class?"

"Yes, blow'd if I ain't."

"Well, look again; I doesn't want to be unpleasant."

With an oath, the already exasperated official flashed his lantern into every part of the carriage, and fussily tossed about the cushions and scat-rugs; then he growled—"Well, I s'pose you're satisfied; there ain't nothing there—so help my Bob! there ain't."

The foreign gentleman, a sallow little personage, with deep dark eyes and large grizzled mustachios, seemed to understand that the final search was over, for he lifted his hat to the guard, and said with a low bow, "Sin complimiento, Señor Guarda, le doy las gracias." (Without compliments, Mr. Guard, I give you thanks.)

"Precious gammon!" growled the other. "Why the devil don't he speak English? But them foreigners are an absurd lot! I'm not to be come over, though," he added, for the politeness of the Spaniard only added to his suspicions; but now Lennard, on hearing the Spanish language, with which his commercial experiences had rendered him familiar, became interested and pressed forward to listen.

"I assure you, sir, that my guardian's pocket has been picked of his portmonnaie—tickets and all; it is most unfortunate!" urged the young lady to the guard; "and I have but a few shillings in my purse."

"Gammon!" was the response of that personage, now appealing to the platform-superintendent, or some such official whose livery and hirsute appendages gave him a semi-military aspect. "I ask this here foreign gent for the tickets of hisself and his girl; but they ain't forthcoming. 'You must pay from the station from which the train started,' says I; but he parleyvoos in some foreign lingo, and the girl tells us in English that they are towerists on a tower, booked through from Hedingburg to Manchester, and that their tickets have been stolen. 'Can't help that, miss,' says I; 'you must pay again.' 'Pay again!' says she, quite proud like; 'blow'd if we does!' 'You must, miss,' says I; 'them's our rools and regulations. Any passinger as carn't produce a ticket pays full fare from the pint of departure. This train is from Hedingburg and the North; and from Hedingburg and the North you two pays at once, or I call in the perlice!'"

"Of course," said the other official; "but this will be a last resort, I hope."

"Then the old covey whispers something to the girl, and she tells me that his pocket had been picked; that he ain't got no money—yet travels in a first-class like the Prince of Wales hisself! I asks if his luggage is labelled; then says

the girl, 'We ain't got no luggage—it's gone by sea to Liverpool from Glasgow.'"

"First-class folks don't usually travel without luggage of some sort—doocid pretty gal, though!" muttered several of the bystanders.

"Luggage gone by sea to Liverpool from Glasgow, and themselves booked through from Edinburgh to Manchester? I can't make it out; it's a rum start, Jack," said the guard.

"I should raythor think so; but look sharp now—full fare from Hedingbourg it must be!" he added, raising his voice, after the fashion of all Britons when speaking to a foreigner.

"Hija de mi corazon,* tell them again," said the old gentleman, with growing alarm.

"Come, come, young 'ooman, you understand the Queen's Henglish, and must pay for both," said the guard, as he very deliberately laid his hand upon her arm.

"Dare you touch me!" she exclaimed to the speaker, a burly red-headed fellow in a brass-bound cap and elaborate collar-badges, who shrank back, muttering,—

"Well, I *am* blowed!"

She looked like a little lady playing the part of an Empress, the carriage and will were so grand and proud, and the power so tiny; yet she seemed so lovely and so fearless amid all that gathering and cold-eyed crowd, whose chief emotion was curiosity, tinged, of course, with suspicion, as the two infringers of the railway bye-laws were only foreigners, penniless apparently, and utterly unfriended. In vain did the young Spanish lady repeat that the old gentleman must have had his pocket-book and portmonnaie, which held their tickets, abstracted by a passenger who sat next him and had left the train at Carlisle, or some station before or after it—she was not quite sure; and in vain did she promise to pay any fares that might be demanded on reaching Manchester, where they were known and had friends. "Es verdad—es verdad!" she added, in her energy lapsing into her native language.

"Neither money, tickets, nor luggage—here's a go!"

The fair stranger was evidently a lady—a Spanish donna; but, in lieu of the orthodox veil, high comb, and black mantilla, she had a little black velvet hat with a piquant ruby feather, a yachting jacket of dark blue cloth with gilt anchor buttons, a rich silk dress of paler blue, tiny Balmorals with high brass heels, a Japanese parasol with a deep white fringe, well-fitting gloves on marvellously pretty hands, and was in bearing as thoroughly English as any girl one may

* Child of my heart.

see on Brighton pier or Margate sands. She was considerably under the middle height, and seemed to be barely eighteen; a vast quantity of golden hair, drawn back from her ears, fell in heavy volume behind ; she had a pure, small profile, a minute and lovely little face, with large, soft eyes, of a hue that appeared to alternate between hazel and dark grey, but were really violet, and with her long lashes and dark brows they seemed to be black as night.

We have been thus minute in describing these personages, as they were fated to have a very material influence in shaping out the future destiny of Lennard Blair, who met them more than once again.

Two policemen now appeared upon the scene, stolid in aspect, blue-coated, and helmeted; dexterously thrusting back the crowd, they placed themselves on each side of the old gentleman, and one, with a thumb pointed over his shoulder, briefly indicated the route they were to pursue. The little man started and twisted his large moustachios with nervous anger, for already the first bell had rung, the guards were shouting "seats" and "tickets," and there was much swaying of lanterns and clinking of hammers, as the soundness of the wheels was tested, amid a vast bustle and hurrying to and fro; and looking piteously about him, the old Spaniard urged in vain that he was a "caballero—y hombre de bueno—hombre honorado !"

Lennard could no longer resist interfering.

"Pray allow me to settle this," he exclaimed, pushing forward and drawing a ten-pound note from his portemonnaie ; "I think you mistake these people, my good fellow. I shall advance what is requisite to send them on to Manchester."

"I thank you, sir—thank you sincerely for this great kindness. Once in Manchester we shall be neither without friends nor funds," said the young lady, with an air of great gratitude, curiously mingled with haughty reserve. "My father (here she mentioned a name, which, being foreign, Lennard failed to catch) will not allow you to be a loser by this politeness if you will favour me with your card."

"Quick, get their tickets for Manchester," said Lennard, slipping a little bribe into the hand of a porter, "and bring them to us in the refreshment-room."

Then he hurried the stranger out of the crowd, but there was scant time, and the very grand young damsel who, with her hair frizzed, and dressed in the extreme of the mode, presided over the realm of dry sandwiches and old sausage-rolls, buttered bread, doubtful-looking fruits, and scalding

tea, was in no mood to hurry herself, and the tickets were brought with the warning, "Train's a-going, sir—look sharp, please," before a glass of wine had been finished by the young lady, who was reiterating her thanks, while her guardian, father, or friend, though the receiver of Lennard's kindness, was cold, sullen, and, like a true Spaniard, an observant and suspicious little man.

The deep liquid eyes of the Spanish girl were fixed upon Lennard with a beautiful expression of fervent thanks, which he never forgot; he had saved her from a serious and public affront, and her voice, when she spoke, had a charming chord in it that was full of tremulous pathos.

"Gracias à Dios! and thanks to you, kind sir; all this shall be amply requited, be assured of that, and that we shall not forget your address."

Lennard was about to take her hand, when—

"Come, señora, we must be gone, if we would not lose the train," growled her male friend in Spanish, and pulling her hand so impatiently that he burst her lavender-coloured kid glove.

The impulsive girl's eyes sparkled as she tore it off, and threw it on the floor.

"Señor Saavedra, you forget yourself! Good night, sir—a thousand thanks, and a thousand more," she added, holding out her hand, a lovely little one, on which more than one gem was glittering, and then she was hurried away.

Bang went the carriage door, the bell jangled, the whistle screamed, and away shot the crowded night train for Manchester, with all its varied lights and faces; the pretty Spaniard was gone, and the adventure over.

"Who the deuce can they be?" thought Lennard, as he loitered at the door of the refreshment-room; not father and daughter, certainly—the affair of the glove showed that—more likely husband and wife—a Spanish actress or dancer and her secretary—a singer, perhaps; the girl seemed thoroughly a lady. Poor thing! how glad I am that I was at hand. Only think if Hesbia had been in such a fix among a parcel of foreign fellows! Well—I hope some one would have befriended her, as I did the little Donna. But what is this? My card, by Jove! The old fellow has either dropped it or left it with her glove—so my ten pounds are gone! Awkward that. Have I been fooled after all? But what a pretty hand the girl had; and such eyes!"

"Seats for Liverpool!" cried a voice without.

Almost without thinking he put the glove into his pocket as he sprang into the train, and was whisked away at a

right angle from the line traversed by his foreign friends. And so for the next forty miles Lennard was again left to his own reflections, roused only now and then as the whistle blew, and the train glided slowly into some station, the name of which would be shouted in that singularly professional and totally unintelligible mode peculiar to railway officials everywhere. At last he found himself in a region of ten thousand lights, as the train on emerging from a long tunnel, swept over the Leeds canal, and he saw himself again in Liverpool.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHY DID I LOVE HER?

"I FIND that I have loitered too long at home—or rather, where was once my home;" thought Lennard, as he found himself in his slippers and dressing-gown, seated before the fire in his old lodgings in Liverpool late on Monday night; "to ship on board the *Valparaiso*, and drop with her down the river on Wednesday evening, leaves me but one entire day to see Hesbia, to propose to her father, to pack up, and do Heaven knows what more."

Next morniug he was up betimes, and when again he saw the beams of the morning sun streaming lazily athwart the dense forest of masts in the docks, and on the huge ungainly masses of brick-buildings, his sojourn at home among the silent woods and hills, his father's death, his wound and the catastrophe of the mine, more than all his engagement to Hesbia seemed a dream that had passed, and as if he had not been out of Liverpool an hour.

He remitted home money to Dr. Feverley for his two old dependants at the village, and as the hour was too early for calling on the Veres, after visiting the dock where the *Valparaiso* lay to ascertain her exact locality, he proceeded along Bath Street and the quays to Canning Place, where he turned, almost mechanically, into the old Alley and the counting-house. There, as if they had never quitted their desks since that night when he came in such haste to draw money and announce his departure for the north, sat old Abel Envoyse, and all the juniors of the establishment, seated on the same stools in the same corners, busy amid the same day or letter-books, and red-edged ledgers; the same hazy light and sombre shadow in the office; the same cobwebs and fly-blown prospectuses and almanacks on the

discoloured walls; but now all sprang from their places and crowded about Lennard, who was a favourite among them, and now regarded as something of a lion after his strange adventures at home, his reported death and escape. All their expectations, however, of "a jolly little dinner somewhere, and hearing the news," were nipped in the bud by his announcing that he had not an hour to spare, but hoped to see some, if not all of them, at an hotel near the dock, ere the *Valparaiso* got up her steam on the morrow.

"Mr. Vere has gone to London," said Mr. Envoyse, polishing his bald head with his handkerchief till it shone like a billiard ball, "and we've had no end of things to worry us here since you left—things I dare say you are pretty well in the dark about; but I shall have your South American memoranda ready for you to-night."

"In London!" exclaimed Lennard, with disappointment in his face and tone.

"Yes—and his address if you wish to write him, is at Sir Cullender Crowdy's place of business. By the way, it is whispered on 'Change that there is a chance of Sir Cullender's being taken into the firm; but Mr. Vere has hinted nothing about it to me."

A stern expression gathered in Lennard's face as the quiet, contented old man said this unthinkingly.

"Sir Cullender a partner; by Jove it will then be high time for me to cut the concern if I can!" was all he said, as he turned way muttering that he had much to do, but would return to the Alley in the evening for his instructions, money, and so forth.

Again he sallied forth into the bustle of the sunny streets, and turned his steps southward, through the Princes Park, till he reached the Aigburth Road, and proceeded on until he was quite in the suburbs. The hour was eleven now, and though still very early, he thought that, under the circumstances, he was fully warranted in breaking through conventional rules, and venturing to call on Hesbia. Her father's unfortunate absence in London, and the knowledge that he, Lennard, would have to sail without seeing him, somewhat deranged his previous plans; and the rumour, though perhaps groundless, that Crowdy was about to come into the firm considerably disturbed him. Crowdy, whom even the little pettifogging Scotch barrister, Dabchick, had so openly denounced as a charlatan and projector of bubble companies? The idea was intolerable!

He was about to see Hesbia again—she who must have mourned for him as one who was gathered with the dead;

but why was it that all the hope and ardour of yesterday seemed to have passed from him! Why was it that he felt so low in spirit, and had in his heart a sense of immediate evil rather than of joy? Do "coming events cast their shadows before?" was it only the gossip of Abel Envoyse, with the inevitable separation, or was it something worse? Anyway a shiver came over him, when he saw Vere's beautiful Tuscan villa that crowned a plateau to which a succession of grassy terraces and gravelled walks bordered by the rarest flowers, gave access; its walls of red brick were covered by carefully-trained rose-trees; its oriels were all of polished stone; and its plate-glass windows shone brightly in the morning sun. It was situated in a lovely spot on a gentle eminence that commanded a view of the upper portion of the Mersey. Liverpool was almost in the distance, and the only sounds near, were those which usually occur in the open country, the cawing of the rooks, or the twitter of the little birds in the hedgerows. A faint silvery mist enveloped the Cheshire side of the river, and into the pure bright air above it, the smoke of many a cottage ascended from the woodlands in high unbroken columns ere they melted away, and the dew yet lingered under the shadow of the gnarled oaks that bordered the old coach-road to Warrington.

The household of Mr. Vere did not seem to be in a great state of activity, for Lennard had to ring twice, and had full time to rally his thoughts, ere the great front door was unfolded by his small acquaintance Buttons, who greeted him, as he thought, with a grin and a leer in his boiled grey eyes, rather than with a respectful bow of welcome. The double ring had also brought a lumbering, hugely-whiskered, and amply-calved "Jeames" in plush to the door.

"Mr. Vere was in London," this solemn personage condescended to observe; "he was not sure whether Miss was at 'ome at that hour; but if Mr. Blair would give his card, he would be 'appy to henquire — he rather thought the carriage 'ad been hordered."

All difficulties on this head were abruptly solved by the appearance of Hesbia in person; attired for visiting, with a charming little hat and feather, and one of her most showy striped piquets, in her fancy for which she almost rivalled the famous Marchioness de Gallifet, who frequently favours the promenaders at Dieppe with a view of sixteen different striped dresses in one day. She started, coloured, and then grew pale, painfully so, on being so suddenly confronted by Lennard. Knowing when he would be in Liverpool, and

that but one entire day would intervene ere the *Valparaiso* sailed, she had feared to see him, and shrunk from denying herself; blushing to do so even before Savonette, who was wholly in his interest, she had been on the point of issuing forth betimes, to spend the whole day in visiting, or in the park, the gardens, anywhere away from all chance of meeting him whose eye she dreaded, and now—now he met her face to face in the hall, and under the observant eyes of several domestics!

"Welcome, Mr. Blair," said she, presenting her hand, nervously, but politely, and feeling constrained to turn back with him, an inconvenience for which (though he heard Maxwell ordered to "countermand the carriage"), he did not feel himself called upon to apologize, and they entered the drawing-room together.

"And you arrived in Liverpool——" she began.

"Late last night, Hesbia—too late to call here;" said Lennard, about to embrace her, but Hesbia skilfully contrived to keep several tables, couches, statues, and glass shades between herself and him, whilst she personally and fussily closed two of the windows, readjusted some of the blinds, and caressed little Fussy, her terrier, which lay coiled up in a beautiful basket on a console.

Again Lennard felt the cold shiver come over him. He was painfully sensible that in her manner and in her eye, he could read the evidence of a change since they had parted. Yet he looked at her wistfully, and thought—was this the rapturous re-union, after an escape such as his?—this the meeting for which his soul had yearned?

"Mr. Blair," she was beginning, when an exclamation of surprise and grief escaped him; "so thank God, you survived the horrors of that night?"

"I escaped and am before you still a living man, Hesbia; but have you not one kiss for me, dearest? Oh, what do all this coldness and agitation mean?"

"Ah, do not ask me!"

Her agitation *was* excessive—almost painful to witness. She threw her parasol and hat upon a table, scattering the bijouterie that lay on it; she pulled off her gloves and cast them on the carpet; she tossed back her rich brown hair from her throbbing temples as if to court coolness, and, while she did so, her white hands trembled violently, and her face grew ashy pale; yet she strove to steel herself for the cruel part she had resolved to play.

"I sail to-morrow, Hesbia," said Lennard, steadying himself by placing a hand on the back of the couch whereon she sat.

"To-morrow—so soon?"

"Yes, so soon; but what does this change mean in you? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no—not ill—not ill. You are going to see grand sights and a beautiful country, after a long sea voyage."

"Two thousand six hundred miles and more, dearest Hesbia."

"And you will soon learn to forget me, to love another, perhaps."

"Hesbia," he exclaimed, with positive alarm, for her manner became hysterical; he approached her, but she started and withdrew to another fauteuil. Then he gazed on her with reproach and pity mingling, as he said, "Have I escaped assassination at the hand of your precious kinsman, and afterwards, by God's mercy, from a horrible death in yonder mine, only to meet with you and to part from you thus? It is inexplicable!"

As yet not a tear had fallen from her eyes, but the brightness had gone out of them and they looked hard and stony.

"Let us be brief and end this most painful interview at once, Lennard," said she, speaking rapidly, with something of a sob in her throat. "Oh, forgive me and spare me your reproaches, for I should have written and explained all, but I pitied you—I pitied you—and could not trust myself to write."

"Pitied me—all, Hesbia—all what?" he asked, furiously.

"I am to marry this man Cowdy. Papa is even now in London arranging the settlements. I am but one victim more among many of the curses brought about by the love of money, 'that joining of house to house and field to field, which corrupts the better part of man's nature.'"

"And woman's too, I think—to marry Sir Cullender!" exclaimed Lennard with growing rage.

"Listen," said Hesbia, imploringly; "do you remember the situation of Pauline in 'the Lady of Lyons,' when Claude Melnotte returns, and when Beauseant offers to her bankrupt father the means of extrication from his monetary difficulties?"

"Yes—yes; but what raving is this? Your father is not situated as old Deschapelle is in the drama."

"I cannot tell you, but I have given my promise in writing."

"To whom?"

"To Sir Cullender."

There was a pause, during which Lennard stood with a pale, almost ghastly face looking down at her, as she cowered upon the sofa with her eyes covered by her hands.

"Betrothed to that man say you—betrothed after your promise to me?"

"I deserve your upbraiding——"

"I do not upbraid you—heaven forbid! I have too much sorrow, too much horror in my heart for that. But tell me more, Hesbia; how came this about?"

"I cannot—I cannot—save that papa has suffered severely by the loss of his mines. Sir Cullender proffers him every monetary assistance, and my hand is the price of it. Now leave me, Lennard, for I cannot bear your presence, while your eyes are full only of indignation and contempt, though I feel myself to be well deserving of both."

"This change is incomprehensible! But oh, Hesbia, before planting the arrow in my heart, you might in mercy have written to me, were it but to take away the poison from its point, though the rankling barb remained. This shock is somewhat sudden! Do you really mean to say that all is at an end—all over between you and me?"

"It must be so, Lennard."

"Must?"

"Yes—I am powerless."

"Is all the past, with its tender vows and passionate kisses, no tie between us?"

"None—none!"

She was weeping freely now, and he held her right hand between his own.

"You reject me, then?" he whispered, with intense sorrow.

"Now and for ever," replied Hesbia, who had thought over all this beforehand, and had secretly and resolutely schooled herself to brave all rather than risk the life of lost wealth and luxury—the career of thrift or poverty predicted by her father.

"Dare you say so, after all that has been—vows and promises?"

"All are broken or given to another. I have no power, no will of my own, so, dear Lennard, do not torture me."

He was going, but the words "dear Lennard" made him linger, and in a torrent of eloquence, supplied by his love and desperation, by the charm of her presence, the brevity of his time, and the priceless object at stake, the retention or revival of her regard for him, he pulled her hands from her face, he showered kisses on her eyes and lips; he prayed her in mercy and in the name of God, not to cast him off for ever; not to blight and blast his future life, for he loved her—loved her better than his own soul; he urged her to

elope with him, to leave her father's house that instant; to marry and sail with him on the morrow; but poor Lennard urged, and she heard him, in vain. She wept bitterly, but steadily refused. His strong, deep passion, so tender and so true, was it, he thought, to be received thus, by one so shallow, so fickle, and so faithless? Love, it would seem, might be foregone, a heart trampled on, and hopes crushed; but while wealth and luxury were secured and kept, what did a few tears matter, hot and salt though they were!

He dropped her hands, and for a few minutes regarded her gloomily and in silence. Then he said,—

"Had you written and broken to me this sudden change, Hesbia, I might have been spared the horror and grief, and you the shame, of an interview like this. And you are actually engaged to this fellow, Sir Cullender, as he calls himself?"

"I am."

"Since when came this cool event to pass?"

"Ask me not. What can that item of the affair matter to you, Lennard?"

"Have you weighed well the end of such a love as his may be for you?"

"I have—I have," said she, weeping.

"Oh, think what is before you, Hesbia Vere, with such a mate as he.

"'As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated to a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down.
He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse!'

How often have we read those verses together, Hesbia! What a bleak history will that of your married life be!"

"The happiest woman, like the happiest nation, has no history," replied Hesbia, quoting a popular author; "we have ever been good friends, Lennard Blair, and as good friends let us part."

The bitterness of the storm was over, and he could be calm now.

"Then you will not leave your selfish father's roof and trust to me?" he urged.

"No, Lennard—now and for ever, no! There are others in this world more deserving of you than I—others whose love you may win."

"True, Hesbia; but none that can ever be to me what you have been," he replied, with his eyes full of tears, as he again forcibly took her hand; and Hesbia, fearing her

own resolution, abruptly requested him to go, to leave her, to release her, and he did so at last, retiring a pace or two and taking up his hat, but slowly and reluctantly.

"Miss Vere," he said, in a low but piercing voice, "for the last time I ask you, is all over between us? do you actually cast my heart back upon myself, and finally reject me?"

"Despite myself," she replied, amid a torrent of tears, "I am the promised wife of another—one of whom my papa approves."

"Then be it so! Fool that I have been, *why did I ever love her?*"

He turned away, reeling like a drunken man. He tried to open the door on the side opposite to the handle, and Hesbia had not strength to ring the bell as a warning to the servants in the hall below. She heard him descend the staircase unattended, his steps die away, and the street-door close.

In a burst of passionate sorrow, that triumphed for a time over her own selfishness, Hesbia buried her face in the down cushions of the blue satin fauteuil, exclaiming, as an apology to herself,—"Oh, if he could only have looked into my heart, he would have seen how I loved him—loved him—though he is too poor to marry!"

Lennard Blair was gone; the closing of the house-door found a terrible echo even in her hollow heart; for she knew his indomitable pride, and that never again would he cross her father's threshold. Never again!

For a time the pretty sensationalist was touched—actually cut to the soul; and certainly, with all her impulsiveness, it was seldom that Hesbia Vere was so deeply moved. However, it was past now, thank Heaven—that worrying interview! it could never be gone over again, though she might get letters full of reproaches and upbraiding; and now she was compelled to hasten to her own room and summon Savonette, for a carriage with visitors had stopped at the front garden-gate, and already Maxwell was ascending the stair with their cards on a silver salver.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PARTED FOR EVER.

He was again out into the bright sunshine, and walking away with lagging steps and a heart full of bitterness, sorrow, and rage. In the strength of the first emotion, he

cursed the hour in which he first saw Hesbia Vere, so fair in face, so seductive in manner, and yet so false in heart! In his sorrow he felt that he could forgive her yet, and take her to his breast again; and while his rage lasted it would have been a perilous moment had he encountered the pale cadaverous face and Jewish eyes of Sir Cullender Crowdy.

"Hesbia, with her Judas kisses!" he muttered; "shame on her; she is well fitted to be the daughter of such a father—the bride of a truculent Jew!"

Deluded and tricked, as he felt himself to be, Lennard lashed his wrath into fever-heat. Avoiding the city, he strolled further into the fields to the end that he might talk, mutter, consider, and commune with himself alone, unwatched and unseen. One fact stood vividly before him—that all was over between Hesbia and himself—a fact most difficult of realization; and that, unless summoned by her, no more would he present himself before her, and never again look into those eyes whose smiles in times past haunted him still. Ever and anon the bitterness of wounded self-esteem rose poignantly in his heart.

"I might have read this girl's cautious and intriguing character—cautious amid all her external air of impulsiveness—before I threw my heart away, before I wasted my honest love upon her. Who but she," he asked of himself, "would have conceived in such veiled and curious terms that letter which her rascal cousin must have read—and so correctly, too?"

Memories of her past flirtations, of coquetries he could remember, seemed now to assume colossal proportions in his jealous mind. He could recall visits of Travice Cheatwood long ago, when *he* was denied admittance, or her non-appearance was excused; and thoughts of these and other instances of petty duplicity came back now like oil upon the flames.

Amid the misery of his mind, he imagined and talked to himself matter enough to have filled an orthodox three-volume novel. Of all the heroes of whom he had ever read, he considered himself the most scurvily used, and now came to the conclusion that, however pleasant love-making may be in reality, the misery of disappointment, rejection or falsehood, was much more entertaining in print than in practice. Giddily he walked on, and heedless whither he went. His hatred and jealousy of the "baronet" who had supplanted him, were only equalled by his contempt for Mr. Vere, and—alas! that such should ever be—for his daughter;

though with this growing scorn, were much of sorrow and of pity mingled.

Long smouldered wrath and aching doubts all set to sleep of late—the same doubts which tormented him on the night of his journey homeward, months ago—were blazing in his heart again! In fancy, he saw his bright Hesbia in the arms of the snake-like Sir Cullender; he saw them at the theatre, the opera, in the park, on horseback or in the carriage, ever and always by that man's side, while he—he who loved her so!

* * * * * * *

Harrowing were the pictures he drew of Hesbia's future, amid all her wealth a joyless, hopeless lot; and in his wrath he pitied, for he loved her still. Were all those years and days and hours of loving dalliance gone for ever? More galling was his regret rendered by the conviction that had he possessed wealth enough to have given him virtue in the eyes of Vere, he and she had not been thus separated, and he had never known her secret selfishness; she had never sold herself, and as he pondered thus, the refrain of the sweet old Scottish song came now to memory:—

"Oh, why should fate sic pleasure have,
Life's dearest bonds untwining,
Or why sae sweet a flower as love
Depend on *fortune* shining?"

By angry thoughts he strove to nurse himself into a steady and settled emotion of contempt, but failed most signally, for times there were when he thought his heart would break, yet only as some will do that "brcakingly live on." He thought he would get over it in time; but at present the wrench was sharp and keen; and so completely was his spirit crushed and oppressed, that for the first few hours he cared not what became of him; then there grew in his heart the craving, aching desire to get from Liverpool as fast and far as possible.

Oakwoodlee was gone; he had no dependence now, save on the house of Vere & Co.; and yet to be a subordinate, a clerk, a mere fractional partner therein; or be even an agent for Crowdy (if, as Envoyse hinted, the baronet came to the firm)--Crowdy, his rival and successful supplanter, was an intolerable prospect and rankled in his soul. The golden dream of wealth which his father had fostered in him, the superstition of the Charter Stone, and his hopes for the future seemed to be sorely blighted now or blotted out for ever.

A dim hope, a tender longing, a mere human instinct that

she might prove true after all—that she might write to him again—lingered in the heart of the poor fellow. Even now —now—a letter full of love and repentance might be waiting for him at his lodgings in the city! He looked at his watch, it was now three o'clock, four hours had he been wandering in the fields, and already shorn of every ray amid the smoke of Liverpool, the autumnal sun was shining in the westward above the villas of New Brighton and the mouth of the Mersey.

Full of the new hope that inspired him, Lennard turned and hastened homeward, and a cab soon whirled him through the streets to his temporary residence.

"A letter? Yes, there *was* a letter!"

He snatched and tore it open only to toss it on the mantelpiece again. It was merely from old Abel Envoyse, containing his instructions and a letter of credit on the house of Don Juan Leonardo & Co. at Vera Cruz.

So the whole day passed away; darkness set in, and the lines of gas-lamps came, like fiery garlands in the streets to replace the set sun; but no message, no letter arrived, and the last hope faded away.

"Yes, life is over," thought he bitterly; but he learned ere long to know that there are overmuch of life and hope too, in the heart at five-and-twenty, to indulge in a conviction so disastrous, save for a time.

He had looked for the last time on a bright and sunny face. The loneliness of his lodgings became insupportable, and heedless of his landlady's request that he would take some food, he walked forth into the streets feeling himself intensely forsaken amid the vast multitudes that hurried to and fro.

"Well, well, to-morrow, thank God, shall see me far away from this, and on the broad Atlantic."

He turned his steps towards Canning Place to post a letter of farewell and of explanation to Feverley.

"Ah, my good friend," he had written, "I now know and feel all that you must have endured in that past time at Monkwood Moat; but your love was true to you, while mine has been false to me. Yet our stories are the same in effect."

As he passed up Canning Place he saw the gas-lights gleaming from the windows of the old familiar counting-house, and heard within the merry voices of some of his hard-worked but heedless young chums of the desk and ledger. He knew that in common courtesy he should bid them all a formal farewell; but shrunk from the task, lest they should see the misery which he felt was so legibly writ-

ten in his face; and so he turned away and trod restlessly on and on, without object, through the streets, though now the night was chilly and the rain was falling heavily.

"Parted for ever!" he muttered; "parted for ever!"

Thenceforward the paths of Hesbia and himself in life would be separate—separate as two parallel lines, which can never, never meet.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SERPENT IN ANOTHER SKIN.

In his errant and reckless mood of mind, Lennard had wandered far, so completely immersed in thought that it was not until he found himself in a part of the town with which he was quite unfamiliar and almost in the dark, for the lamps were few and irregular, and the rain pouring heavily, that he thought of a necessity for turning homeward.

A suspicious-looking personage, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and a muffler up to his nose, bluntly inquiring the hour, sharpened Lennard's faculties; but at that moment a church clock striking eleven, relieved him of the necessity of parrying the question, or pulling forth his watch, and being, perhaps, released from all future care for it.

"Eleven, and where am I?" thought he; and as he turned in the direction which he conceived to be homeward, the rain and the wind came with increasing violence against him.

A recess off the street—a species of arcade of bricks and timber—within which he could see the flywire blinds of a tavern of humble, even of mean appearance, lured him to take advantage of the temporary shelter it afforded, amid the gloom of the narrow street, from the chill wind and the drenching rain. He had been there some time before he perceived that another person shared the same asylum—a pale-faced and shivering wretch, apparently the same man in the hat and muffler, who had so recently accosted him. Completely roused and suspicious now, Lennard drew nearer to observe him by the light that streamed from the window of the tavern.

"O-o-oh! it is so jolly cold, isn't it?" said the stranger, shudderingly, while rubbing one hand over the other in the vain attempt to warm them.

Startled by the voice which was familiar to him, Lennard drew still nearer, but kept in shadow while reconnoitring his companion, who was exposed to the full glare of light from the window. Then, despite the broken and sodden

hat, the greasy muffler, the worn and tattered surtout buttoned well up to the chin, the trowsers all frayed at the feet —despite the gaunt misery that hollowed the cheeks and bloodshot eyes, in this squalid creature he recognized Travice Cheatwood—and Cheatwood in the same moment recognized him!

In no mood to speak, Lennard gave him a glance of mingled detestation and contempt, and turned away.

"Perhaps, Mr. Blair, if you knew that for eight-and-forty hours I have scarcely tasted food—" he was beginning.

"Bah! do not appeal to my clemency—you who would have shot me if you could. Begone, sir!"

"This place is as free to me as to you," said the other, with a little of his old *brusquerie;* "so I won't 'begone, sir!'"

"Not if I call in the aid of the police?"

"That is about the last thing you would do," replied Cheatwood, quietly; "I know you better than you do yourself, perhaps. I shot *at* you, true; but, by Heaven, and may I never taste food—I who am starving and know too well what hunger is—if I meant to do worse than merely to wound—to wing you!"

"A cool admission; but why—what wrong had I ever done you?"

"You had exposed my play at cards, and I was mad—." His thick unpleasing voice became more husky as he spoke.

"Mad?"

"Yes, with love for my cousin Hesbia."

This was not quite true, for love had never disturbed the equanimity of Cheatwood's mind; but to own it served his purpose now, better than he supposed, for as "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," Lennard was disposed to view the erring Travice with a more compassionate eye.

"I, too, am almost mad," he muttered, "if you knew all. And you are starving?"

"Yes—look at me."

For the entire day no food had passed the lips of Lennard Blair; he had never missed it, but now a frightful thirst was upon him.

"And all the money I gave you, Cheatwood——"

"Is gone—gone beyond recall."

"Come with me," said Lennard, "you shall get some food in this tavern. I have but a few hours to spend in Liverpool, and they may as well be passed here as anywhere else. First tell me, why were you so rash as to venture back to this town?"

"When in Glasgow," replied the unabashed Travice, "I

thought that instead of trying a distant colony, I might find, perhaps, 'fresh woods and pastures new' in Ireland, where I am unknown. I got screwed with your horrid poisonous Scotch whisky, tumbled on board at the Broomielaw; but instead of being for Belfast or the Liffey, she proved to be for Liverpool, so here I am again."

"Then, how about—about the bill of exchange?"

"Somehow, the idea has luckily been set about by Nathan Nab, that I perished in old Vere's mines, so at present I'm pretty safe, being supposed to be defunct. A devil of a mess that affair was underground, and all through my lighting a cigar!"

"Oh, Mr. Cheatwood, think of all those who perished in the pit!"

"Why?" said he, with disdain in his pale green eyes.

"Have you no pity?"

"Is that a pun, my friend?—for, if so, it is a deuced bad one. What were they but a parcel of obscure wretches, of whose lives, had they survived, no trace would be remaining fifty years hence, more than of the rats and mice in yonder old store. Bah! such people are foredoomed to oblivion anyway."

In the shabby coffee-room of the tavern the waiter, after scrutinizing their appearance (and having evident suspicions of Lennard from the equipment and general air of his companion), brought to order a supper of chops and ham and eggs for Travice, with brandy-and-water hot for both, all of which were paid for by Lennard, who had not failed to perceive, above the mantel-piece, a framed and flyblown placard, announcing to all whom it might concern—"Pay on delivery."

Travice having removed his sodden hat and worsted muffler, placing both within the influence of the fire, the flame of which he roused with the carving-fork—the poker having been removed from motives of prudence or economy—proceeded to eat like a famished ostrich, and to talk with increasing fluency, while a succession of brandies and water hot were ordered, and duly paid for by Lennard.

"Yes, by Jove! I'm low enough now, Blair—seedy, as you see. God knows, I'm come down like the man on 'his last legs,' from 'sunshine and champagne to clouds and bottled porter;' and times there are when, in lieu of a *petit verre* of cognac or La Grande Chartreuse, pure as crystal, I take a draught from the nearest pump as a relish to my dinner—a dinner at which a cat's-meat man would turn up his nose, and the cats, too, perhaps would turn up theirs."

As he ate and talked, his hollow cheeks seemed to expand and the colour to return to them.

"That thick moustache—well corked, I think—alters your appearance greatly," said Lennard.

"Artistically done—isn't it? Ah! my fair moustache has changed its cut as well as hue, and I have done for ever with the goatee beard—of Yankee rather than of formal cut. If I could only revive my toggery—but even the pump won't do that!"

Lennard's heart was softened—his spirit crushed by what he had undergone with Hesbia; hence he was more enduring to the fallen and degraded Travice Cheatwood.

"Reform if you can, Travice," said he, after a pause; "you have had many warnings of evil—many chances for good. Take heed while you may."

"It is too late—too late," replied the other huskily and half-savagely, with his mouth full.

"Too late for what?"

"To become the prodigal son—to do the 'repentant sinner' dodge. I am a deuced deal more likely to continue the 'frightful example' the parsons cant about."

"It is never too late to do good—never too late to see the truth on this side of the grave."

"Don't bother in this sententious fashion, and don't take to preaching, whatever you do. Drink and be jolly! I am as thirsty as the camels in the desert—or was it the Cossacks we used to read about at school, in Hume's History of England—or some such book? And so you sail to-morrow for South America?"

"Yes—by the *Valparaiso*."

"I wish your luck were mine! For, though the affair of old Vere's bill has partly blown past, I am in danger of arrest for other pranks and misfortunes."

"Hush—in danger?"

"Yes—hourly," said Cheatwood, drawing down the discoloured window-blind, lest some face might be pecring in from without.

"Such a life must be horrible!"

"Deuced unpleasant anyway. But how do you and the divine party stand—eh? Speak—you look uncommonly low to-night."

The supper had been removed, and more brandy—double allowances—ordered. Lennard had barely caten a morsel, and now the fumes of the potent spirit were mounting into his head. The tavern was lonely and silent; the shabby-looking old waitcr sat half-asleep in the bar without the

room, wishing the two late visitors in a very warm climate indeed. In the streets no sound was heard but the rain, as it lashed the windows and bubbled in the choked sewers and surging gutters.

In the fulness of his overcharged heart—in his anxiety perhaps to share his secret with another—even with such a creature as this cousin of Hesbia Vere—Lennard was weak enough to relate all that had transpired at the Villa in the forenoon ; and a covert gleam of malignant triumph and of satisfaction gradually stole over the face of Travice as he listened.

"You tell me just what I would expect of her," said he ; "she is a case-hardened lot—barely had she left school when she had two engagements, and half a dozen very serious flirtations, so don't sorrow for her, or fancy that she'll 'waste her sweetness' on old Crowdy. Not a bit of it ; I know my gentle cousin better. Why, I was her fool and plaything, when she had no better game in the cover !"

"Don't talk of her so slightingly, Cheatwood. I am sorry I told you."

Travice laughed hoarsely and loudly, and then added, "A confounded skittish jade ! She'll lead that fellow Crowdy a dance yet, or I am much mistaken. I wonder who the lucky swain may be that—that——"

"She will really love ?" said Lennard, mournfully.

"Not at all—nothing so stupid."

"What then ?"

"Endow with her worldly goods after he has put the magic ring on her third finger."

"Crowdy is to be her husband—did I not say so ?—Crowdy, who is to become a partner in the firm of Vere & Co," said Lennard, bitterly and emphatically.

Cheatwood gave a long and angry whistle, for he considered that his uncle had somehow, in the matter of the firm, always used him scurvily.

"You can never know, Cheatwood, how much I loved your cousin ! It was for her sake I have ever sought to screen and serve you."

"Thanks—don't for a moment imagine that I ever supposed it was for my own sake, or my own virtues. And your constancy, my unhappy Lothario——"

"Will endure for ever !" sighed Lennard, as he drained his glass and sighed.

"For ever is a mighty long time—wish these goes of brandy would last so !"

Acting on the hint Lennard rung the bell, rousing once more the sleepy waiter.

"I could cure you of this love of yours in a year—or a month or two more at furthest."

"How?"

"By a very simple process if I had the power. I'd marry you to your Dulcinea, and by the time mentioned she would be sure to bolt with some tenor singer or d——d dragoon fellow; or see the error of her ways, perhaps, and leave all her money past you for the conversion of the Spaniards or the Feejee Islanders."

"The hour is late," said Lennard, impatiently, for he was in no mood for banter.

"Don't be in a hurry, pray; it is so jolly comfortable here—so cold and wet without."

"But consider the waiter."

"Bother the waiter—who ever considers such people?"

"Are your lodgings a long way off?"

"Yes, a deuced long way off—so far that I don't think I shall ever find them," was the significant reply.

"You have a little money—of course?"

"A little—yes," said Travice, eyeing wolfishly the port-monnaie which Lennard was holding open; "devilish little indeed!"

"How much, now?" he asked, smiling kindly.

"Pray spare my feelings—don't inquire. How much is a man likely to have in his purse who has been starving for eight-and-forty hours?" exclaimed Travice, with a strange but ferocious laugh.

"True—pardon me."

"Go-ahead! 'What's the odds so long as you are happy?' a beautiful axiom that, old fellow, and many a time I've found it answer me."

Lennard slipped a couple of sovereigns, and all his loose silver, into Cheatwood's hands, which closed like a vice upon the welcome cash.

"Thanks—thanks; but one good turn deserves another—you'll have a cigar from me?"

"With pleasure," said the other, but doubtfully, as he had a serious horror of a bad cigar.

"I am not so poor as to be unable to procure a luxury of *this* peculiar kind," said Travice with a smile, the analysis of which was impossible, as he produced (not as he used to do, from a beautiful silver case, but from a well-worn old pocket-book) a couple of cigars and proffered them to Lennard, who bit the end of one and proceeded to light it, and saying,

"Try mine," laid his embossed case on the table.

Travice watched the process of lighting the cigar, and the first few whiffs thereof with more interest than such a simple action seemed to merit.

"You like it?"

"Yes," said Lennard, as Travice accepted one of his.

"It's a real Lugerdita brand—thirty shillings per hundred."

Lennard made a grimace—for he thought this but a poor recommendation.

"You can have a light from me," he said.

But this offer Cheatwood hastily declined, preferring one from the gas jet.

"You'll have a tidy lot of tin to take out with you, I suppose?" he observed in his old slangy way.

"Not much; but I have ample letters of credit on the bank of Vera Cruz, and on the firm of Leonardo and Company."

"Ah—indeed—and who are they?"

"Spanish merchants. So I shall get on very well, no doubt."

"And your passage is taken in the *Valparaiso*, you said?"

"Yes—luggage packed at my lodgings—all ready to start after breakfast to-morrow—and then—then, thank Heaven, I shall turn my back on Liverpool," said Lennard, who began to feel strangely exhilarated and light in the head. Fearing what he might say, for he seemed to have lost control of his tongue, he continued to smoke and listen to Travice.

"A sly, cold-blooded old humbug is Vere," said the latter; "but he is safe to come to grief, with his Great Pacific and Panama circumbendibus line of steam clippers, or whatever the deuce it is—and his precious baronet, too! even the little Scotch lawyer prig—what's his name—Dabchick—saw through that fellow! So you like the cigar, eh? they are pretty strong; you won't smoke another," added Travice Cheatwood, with a laugh so mocking, that Lennard, whose faculties were rapidly becoming more and more obscure, and who was striving to excuse himself, and explain that he had been without food since morning; that the brandy or the cigar were hence making him extremely giddy—sick in fact; that the room was whirling round him; that it seemed to be full of mocking Travice Cheatwoods; that he must begone and so forth; striving we say, but in vain, to speak, for his powers of utterance and of volition seemed alike to have left him. Then he suddenly fell on the floor in a fit of utter stupefaction, the last sound of which he was sensible

being the fierce derisive laugh of his companion. The cigar had been drugged by a powerful narcotic.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

OUTWITTED.

Cold and stiff, benumbed and sick, giddy and utterly bewildered as to his whereabouts, Lennard awoke for a few minutes, and then closing his eyes again, believed that he was dreaming, for the place in which he found himself seemed so strange and unusual in aspect. A bare little chamber, totally destitute of furniture, with a small and very dirty window, high up in the wall, and well secured inside by bars of iron, between which a network of dusty spiders' webs had been spun and left undisturbed. He found himself in his shirt and trousers, lying on a hard and bare wooden bench or bed, the pillow of which was like a wooden step, but only some three inches or so in height.

"A strange dream this!" he muttered; but anon the fumes of coarse tobacco, stealing through an open door from an outer chamber, forced upon him the conviction that it was no dream, and shudderingly he sat up and looked around him.

The loss of Hesbia now rushed to his memory, rousing him to full consciousness. It seemed as if his sky had grown dark; as if the face of nature had changed, and the old crushing, blinding, and bewildering sensations of yesterday returned in full force. All that had made his course of life so hopeful; all that made wealth and position worth the struggle and attainment had passed away. Before him were doubt and grief; behind a past to be viewed only with regretful contempt and disdain.

But his present plight was more bewildering than all. He knew not what to say, or do, or think. Where was he? Had he gone mad? His blood ran cold at the idea. What strange place, what desolate den was this in which he found himself? How had he come there? had he been tipsy? in a row, or what? and where were his clothes? He strove to recollect; but the memory of last night had passed from him. He only remembered the last glance of Hesbia, and leaving the villa to wander aimlessly in the fields.

"Hollo there!" he exclaimed, on hearing voices and footsteps in the outer chamber.

The door was thrown open, and two men—in one of whom, with disgust and alarm, he recognised an inspector of police—appeared.

"What—stirring at last!" said the latter, a pleasant and jolly-looking man, with a strong Lancashire accent.

"Have I slept here long?" stammered Lennard, who was still giddy and confused.

"Long, by jingo; I should think so! some eighteen hours or so, more or less."

"Eighteen hours?"

"Yes—by my watch."

"And it is now—now—" added Lennard, feeling for his own; but he sought it in vain.

"About six in the evening."

"The evening, and I should have been on board the *Valparaiso* by noon!" he exclaimed, staggering to his feet, only to fall back on the bench, as his limbs refused to support him.

"Take care, my good fellow," said the inspector, kindly, "or you may hurt yourself. The Doctor said that some time would elapse before you got over the effects of it."

"*It*—effects of what?"

"The cigar that was found beside you when taken in charge. You've got yourself into a fine mess, my lad."

"Sir, I do not understand you," said Lennard, haughtily.

"Perhaps so; but how came it all about?"

Lennard's faculties were still far from clear, so he could not reply to the question.

"Water," said he, "give me water—for I feel as if dying of thirst."

Then he drank deeply from a jug of water which was handed to him by a little man who had not yet spoken, but whose sharp ferret-like eyes had been regarding him attentively; and Lennard, though he knew it not, had a black ring round his hard baked lips, while both his eyes were bloodshot and rather wild in expression.

"You must have fallen among bad company last night," said the inspector, "and got yourself drugged and robbed, it would appear, for when found in a low tavern near this station-house, you had been stripped of every article save your boots and trousers; but the Doctor has seen you twice, and says you shall be all right in a day or two."

"Travice Cheatwood!" muttered Lennard, through his clenched teeth, and he saw it all now.

The cigar had been drugged! Travice had then, on its taking fully effect, stripped him of hat, coat, vest, and tie, for his own adornment, leaving in their places the old tattered surtout, the dirty muffler, and the sodden wide-awake, girt by a rag of black crape; but Travice had done worse, for he had carried off Lennard's watch, card and

cigar-cases, his portmonnaie and pocket-book. Even a set of valuable studs had been torn from his shirt-front. An attempt had evidently been made to wrench off his father's signet-ring. It alone was left; but the finger it encircled was severely bruised and sprained. He had been found thus by the waiter, who immediately summoned the police, so the mystery was a very prosaic affair after all.

"So—so, this has been your doing, scoundrel!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice; "but I may yet overtake you, to your fear and confusion. I have no cause for mistaken mercy now, Mr. Travice Cheatwood!"

"*Who* did you say, sir?" asked the little man, now bustling past the inspector; "did you mention the name of one Travice Cheatwood?"

"I did."

"Then this here has been one of his little games; but is he alive—can it be the same?"

"I have been again the victim of a wretch, compared with whose horrible career that of Thyestes was a joke!"

"I don't know the gent as you're speaking of, but this I know—you've been the victim of one of the most precious rascals in Liverpool, and that's a wide word, as Inspector Smith will tell you. And now that I looks at you, I find we have met before."

"Indeed!" said Inspector Smith suspiciously, as he came a pace nearer Lennard.

"Lor' don't you mind o' *me*, Mr. Blair—Mr. Nathaniel Nab as came to Scotland with a warrant for the arrest of Travice Cheatwood, on charges of felony, and got flung into an 'ole or hold quarry, along with one Grabbie, in the hexecution of our dooty."

"Who, then, is this person?" asked the inspector.

"Mr. Lennard Blair, of the 'ouse of Were and Co., in the halley off Canning Place. I knows the young gentleman, very well, and a very 'spectable young gentleman he is."

"All right—in that case you'll be able to take care of him, see him home, and so forth."

"With pleasure. I read in the papers all about your escape from the coal-mine; but s'help my bob, I thought you had surely had enough of that cre Cheatwood to make you avoid him—keep out of his way at least?"

"I was doing him a kindness, even after all the mischief he had wrought me—a mere act of human charity, for he told me that he was starving—and this is his mode of repayment."

"Knowing his character as you do, why did you condescend to sit at the same table with him?" asked Inspector Smith.

"You may well ask the question; but the night was cold and wet—I was broken in spirit, too—but how singularly constituted is the human heart!"

"Yes, by jingo, a remarkable utensil; but only a force-pump, arter all," commented Mr. Nab.

"This is Wednesday, the twenty-fourth of the month—the day on which I am to sail by the *Valparaiso* steamer for South America, on important business. I have not a moment to lose," said Lennard, starting forward; "would you kindly get me a cab that I may drive off at once?"

"Wait a little, please Mr.—what name did you say?"

"Blair," suggested Nab to the inspector.

"You may yet be required by the police magistrates."

"Detention may cause the greatest confusion!" urged Lennard, with an emotion of intense annoyance.

"Can't help that, sir; as Mr. Nab says, 'duty is duty,' and mine is to have a memorandum made of this affair, and a note of all you have lost—the number of your watch, for instance, if you know it. Such may readily lead to the arrest of this Travice Cheatwood, for Mr. Nab and other able detectives shall at once be set on his track."

"I thank you sir," said Lennard, to whom the delay was intolerable, while the inspector slowly and deliberately entered a list of all the items he had lost with a minute description thereof into an official book; after this a cab was procured, and Lennard, in a fever of impatience, was driven to his lodgings, accompanied by Mr. Nab.

On turning into the familiar street, and arriving at the equally well-known door, a fresh surprise awaited him, though the emotion of his landlady on seeing him in his present peculiar plight was only equalled by her astonishment in seeing him at all!

"Ain't you gone, sir—ain't you sailed?" she exclaimed, with uplifted hands.

"No—do not you see that I have not; I have come for some clothes."

"Lawk, sir, at ten this morning your luggage and everything were taken on board the *Valparaiso*."

"By whom?"

"The gentleman you sent for them."

"I sent no one," said Lennard, with a groan, while Mr. Nab gave a low whistle, expressive of surprise or professional satisfaction on hearing of a fresh piece of roguery.

"And is everything of mine gone?" asked Lennard.

"All but some letters you left on the mantelpiece, and which, fortunately, I forgot to give to your friend."

"Friend, indeed!"

"Lor' bless me, Mr. Blair, what has happened?" she asked kindly, when Lennard reeled, as if intoxicated, towards his old room; and then, leaving him to tell his own story, Mr. Nathaniel Nab plunged again into the cab, and was driven at a furious speed on an errand of inquiry to the dock where the *Valparaiso* lay, or rather had lain, for by that time she was out of the river, and at sea under sail and steam. "Mr. Lennard Blair was aboard with all his luggage," as he was duly informed by a clerk (at the Shipping Office), who averred that he had seen that gentleman—or one who called himself Blair—select his own berth, and thereafter take a glass of sherry and Angostura bitters with the captain, in the saloon cabin.

"It is as rum a start as I ever come across! so he's off to Werra Crooz!" soliloquised Mr. Nab, as he drove back to Blair's lodgings, and then the whole story was made plain.

At ten that morning a well-dressed gentleman, whose description and personal appearance exactly tallied with those of Mr. Cheatwood, arrived at Lennard's residence, and, showing a card which the landlady at once recognised as one of Lennard's own, announced that he had come with instructions to settle her bills, to give Mr. Blair's kindest regards, and take his luggage to the docks. A cab had been called, and with all Lennard's property, the enterprising Mr. Cheatwood had gone on board the *Valparaiso* in his name, just as she was slowly steaming out into the fair way, and had sailed with her for South America, leaving all his debts, duns, and rogueries as a legacy to his friends and country.

"Another jolly swindle is the cabin-fare—thirty-six pounds to South Merricker by the bi-monthly line," said Mr. Nab, laughing heartily; "he's given us the slip anyway. S'help my bob, but it's enough to cure one of smoking this is! By one cigar, in a coal mine, this fellow blows hisself and every one else up, and by another he floors you outright, and gets a free passage to Werra Crooz, with no end of houtfit and plunder. Brayvo! it's as good as a play, it is!"

"To you, sir, perhaps it may be," said Lennard, angrily; "but you must excuse me from seeing it in the light you do."

To Mr. Nab the whole affair appeared a joke—a clever trick; for every hour of the day he was face to face with roguery. But it was a serious loss for Lennard. Everything he possessed was gone, save his letters of instructions and credit, which yet lay on the mantelpiece, with a torn glove beside them—the tiny kid glove of the pretty foreign girl, whom, in his now jaundiced views of humanity, he believed to be also an impostor, or the aider and abettor of one.

He felt baffled, beaten, and disgusted with the game of life; and, after despatching an almost illegible note to worthy Abel Envoyse, stating all that had just happened, he retired to bed, for his whole system was yet oppressed by the poisonons nature of the cigar by which he had been deluded.

CHAPTER XLIX.

OFF THE BELL BUOY AT LAST.

Ill and alone at his lodgings—ill and miserable—Lennard found even the visits of old Abel Envoyse a species of relief. To his more heedless chums of the counting-house he ordered himself to be denied; and no message or letter ever came from the Veres. Abel had secured a passage for Lennard in the next vessel, the *Golden Dream*, one of those large and magnificent ships of the West Indian and Pacific Company which was to sail on the 10th of the next month for Vera Cruz, *viâ* Port-au-Prince and Kingston.

"It's all arranged, for I've just been to Dale Street; and this time I shall see you on board myself, sir," added the old man, laughing; and then he gave Lennard much good advice, urging upon him the necessity of cultivating that which he justly termed "an enthusiasm in life." "You are too young," he would say, for he shrewdly suspected Lennard's secret, "far too young to have that glorious emotion either blunted or dissipated. You have not come in contact with mankind sufficiently to be so; and in battling with the world, the spirit of enthusiasm should be deepened and strengthened in the hearts of us all!"

Then Lennard would blush for himself as Abel Envoyse spoke, for he knew that the hard-working managing clerk had a sickly wife, a large family, and several poor relations all dependent on his health and exertions for their daily bread; and yet this fine old fellow could preach thus of enthusiasm in life! Something of his spendthrift father's pride of birth, with other emotions he had learned to deem absurd or behind the age, would come back at times to Lennard's mind; and then he would think, with a revengeful scorn, which, if not soothing, was nearly so, of the cold-blooded *parvenu* and his selfish daughter who had so lured and beguiled him.

A letter came from Feverley, with a package from Steinie and Elsie. The gift of the former—having heard of his illness—was an old hunting-flask of his father's, full of the

purest Glenlivat: from the latter came a well-corked bottle of water from the well of the Tor Hill, her own sovereign remedy for all ailments; also, some thick woollen comforters, stockings, and wristlets, to keep him warm and cosy in the tropics—a quarter whereof Elsie's ideas were somewhat vague and strange.

Mr. Envoyse mentioned incidentally that Miss Vere had gone to London to join her father. "To London—where Crowdy is!" thought Lennard. This quite accounted for her oblivion of him and of the ill-treatment he had received anew from her wretched cousin. She had, indeed, thrown him completely over; and now there were times when he felt himself alone—almost as much alone in spirit as when he had been shut up in that mine, that living grave, with God and the Dead! In anger and with hatred, he recalled the face and figure of Mr. Vere, jingling, as was his custom, his loose silver, as if the sound thereof was grateful to his ears and to his soul; Vere, whom he now deemed the very incarnation of mammon and of mercantile hypocrisy, combined with an assiduity to business and a regularity of habit unsurpassed by the sun himself; Vere, rigidly wearing black, sleek and smooth-faced to unpleasantness, rather inclined to corpulence, very fair-complexioned, with colourless eyes, and light hair barely tinged with grey. He could picture him now, with his subtle suavity to the supposed wealthy Crowdy, with his bland smile, and his jaw which might have been modelled from that of a tiger-cat, and, like those of a tiger-cat, his large and quick eyes ever watchful and on the alert. He was a regular attender at church too, especially when at home in Liverpool, where none made louder or more sonorous responses than he.

Of him and "the Crowdy,"—as Lennard termed the baronet, in angry derision—there came no news to Mr. Envoyse, not even the most vague rumours now.

"Had I not assigned Oakwoodlee for a further interest in the firm, I might have turned its value to other account," thought Lennard, "or perhaps retained it altogether; but to be their petty neighbour at Blairavon—*her* neighbour—no, no, never! I must realize what I actually possess as soon I may, and get rid for ever of Vere, Crowdy, and Co. But action and change of scene must first be tried—so Vera Cruz be it!"

That his son, by industry and toil—though, oddly enough, Richard Blair despised them both—might regain the wealth and position of which extravagance had deprived him, had ever been, as the old gentleman a thousand times averred,

"his earnest prayer—his golden dream;" and Lennard, who, despite his practical experiences, was by education somewhat of a visionary and one who clung to foreshadowings, deemed it a strange coincidence that the very ship on board of which Envoyse had secured his passage for the second time should be named *The Golden Dream.*

So the time passed on; the 10th of the next month came, and Lennard found himself on board the great ship and bound for the sunny tropics.

Would he ever return? At that moment he cared little whether he ever did so. His first desires were action, change, and excitement—to be away from where he was! If he did return, months or years hence, how might Hesbia be situated? A widow, perhaps; there certainly did not seem to be overmuch of life in that cadaverous baronet. Anyway, in the first instance, there seemed to be ninety-nine chances to one that, unless death or disaster occurred, she would, ere the month was out, be the wife of Sir Cullender. Well, well, ere that came to pass he would be under the Southern Cross.

Even if she did not figure at St. George's, Hanover Square, would *he*, Lennard Blair, marry her now? No, a thousand times no, and he struck the deck with his heel at the thought.

Farewells were passing around him on all sides—farewells that were warm and kind, or earnest and sorrowful, according to the ties that were being broken or the hope of return. His old chums of the office stood on the receding quay waving their hats; little Joe Slobkins, who played the flute and sang sentimental songs; Jemmy Piper, who was so great in private theatricals, and believed himself quite equal, if not superior, to Toole; old Abel Envoyse, with his green goggles, huge gingham, and yellow bandanna; Smith, Brown, and Jones all were there crying, "God bless you, old fellow—God speed you, Blair!" and his heart yearned towards them—poor drudges of the desk and ledger—and he thought of all their well-worn jokes and little enjoyments in which he would share no more; but he knew that all of them would drink to his health and success that night, when he should be far away on the world of waters.

Evening was closing when the great ship was warped out of the wilderness of docks, and began to steam slowly down the broad bosom of the Mersey, with her fore and aft canvas set. They were soon abreast of the Bell Buoy, and when they rounded the Battery and Point of Newbrighton,

with all its beautiful villas, Liverpool was sinking amid the haze and mist astern, and the *Golden Dream* was hauled up for the Irish Sea.

On her lofty poop, Lennard remained long watching the flat shore grow fainter and more faint, dimmer and lower, as they glided past lights and headlands, bays and sand-banks.

The cordage strained; the bell clanged out at times; the engine-room lights cast weird red gleams aloft on sail and spar and smoking funnel, and now the square canvas was braced sharp up, for the wind and sea were setting hard in shore. The great ocean-steamer heeled over to port, and ever and anon, as she plunged amid the black waves, the spray flew over her, hissing white and salt to leeward.

"The gloomy night was gathering fast;"

it was already stormy and cloudy in aspect; yet Lennard continued to linger on the poop, as he preferred it to the crowded and brilliantly-lighted saloon — crowded with strange people, strange faces and voices, though with many of these he would become familiar enough on the morrow; and when ultimately he sought his berth and turned in for the night, the revolving lights that twinkled at the horizon, were those of the rugged and precipitous island known as the Calf of Man; and they then bore north and by west, as the *Golden Dream* flew through the Irish Sea.

CHAPTER L.

ON BOARD THE "GOLDEN DREAM."

SUPPOSING, of course, that there was not a soul on board in whom he could feel the slightest interest, and wishing to be as far as possible on the long, long voyage of many thousand miles which lay before him, Lennard Blair lay long in his berth next day, having no desire to encounter a host of sea-sick passengers either on the deck or in the saloon, and gave full swing without reserve to the unprofitable task of worrying himself by useless reflections on the past; a tone of mind or tendency of thought to which, no doubt, a few qualms of the *mal-de-mer* contributed, while the *Golden Dream*, a stately Clyde-built ship of two thousand tons' burthen, and more than five hundred horse-power, steamed on through St. George's Channel with all her canvas set, and a rippling torrent of black smoke issuing from each of her short and stunted funnels, which were painted red, with a rake aft.

In the evening, however, he could not resist the invitation of the steward to "turn up" (while supplying him with a libation of brandy and seltzer) and take a last view of the land, which was then sinking into the waste of waters on the port quarter. Accordingly he dressed in haste, muffled himself and came on deck in time to watch, wistfully, from the mizzen-rigging, up which he went a little way, the faint grey stripe—the last of Britain's isle—melting away at the horizon, and he was told by the boatswain, Mr. Kit Kentlege, a personage of whom we shall hear more hereafter, and with whom an exchange of tobacco-pouches on the previous evening had established an acquaintance, that it was "Saint David's Head on the coast of Pembroke; and lower down, out o' sight a'most, lay Milford Haven;" that now busy and crowded port, the name of which is so full of the memories of Shakespeare, the cave of Belarius, and the sorrows of Imogen—the gentle, the tender, and the true. There were few passengers on deck, and these were chiefly men, who were smoking abaft the funnels, because there the motion of the ship was less felt; so Lennard Blair had the poop nearly to himself. There were, he knew, some lady passengers on board; but now all were below; the evening was louring, the sea and wind were heavy; dark clouds enveloped all the sky, save where a red and fiery streak lingered to the westward, and against it, the waves, as if traced by a brush dipped deep in ink or indigo, were rising and falling alternately in monotonous succession, while, with both her engines clanking, panting, straining, puffing, and literally tearing a passage through the foaming sea, the great steamship flew on, the billows racing past on either side, to meet and bubble, seethe and boil in her long white wake astern.

Occupied entirely with his own thoughts, somewhat soothed by the whistling of the wind aloft, by the hiss of the careering waves below, and by the sense of rapid motion and progression, though personally quiescent and inactive, Lennard leaned over the taffrail and gazed dreamily down on the sea, on the ship's pale wake, which he could trace for miles astern—homeward—through the darkening sea; for under the clouds of the coming night it was darkening fast and far. Away to the westward, where the fiery streak was lingering, but where the clouds were setting darkest, he knew the coast of Ireland lay—the mountains of Munster—but no trace of them was visible, for some eighty miles of water rolled between, and this time to-morrow should see the *Golden Dream* far out on the wide Atlantic. "What is it," asks a novelist, "that so inevitably inspires sad and depres-

sing thoughts as we walk the deck of some craft in the silence of the night's dark hours? No sense of danger near, we hold on our course swiftly and steadily, cleaving the dark waves, and bending gracefully beneath the freshening breeze. Yet still the motion, which in the bright sunshine of the noonday tells of joy and gladness, brings now no touch of pleasure to our hearts." Amid the thoughts, the time, the place, and the utter novelty of his situation excited, there were periods when his soul became filled with intense pity for Hesbia. Then all his old love would return; a longing, aching desire to go back devoured him with the desperate hope that he might see her once again—speak to her, look into her eyes once more, and implore her to be true to him, if not too late!

But all this was impossible now, for the great ship was rolling ceaselessly on and on—and every revolution of her inexorable wheels increased the distance that was—it might be—happily yawning between them. Then a sullen desperation took possession of his heart, and luckily for him, his pride and wounded self-esteem found a temporary solace in rage and contempt; thus ever and anon were a thousand wild fancies careering through his mind. His past life seemed to be partially blotted out, and a new one lay before him—nay, had actually begun; a new home, new friends, and new faces were there, and all the old seemed far, far away, or to have been looked on, long, long ago. Yet still in vivid recollection, he saw Blairavon with its slated turrets and crow-stepped gables rising above the old forest trees; the white-washed walls of humbler Oakwoodlee, with old Elsie and Steinie Hislop dozing about in the sunshine that cast the shadow of the hills upon the woods and river; there was the Charter Stone too, with its grove of solemn Scottish pines; yonder rose Craigellon with its deep and silent loch, and the trysting stile—pshaw! he turned his face resolutely to windward and resolved to think no more.

Among the passengers were few who, to him, seemed of much interest. Some were gentlemen of colour, well-bred and pleasant fellows, returning to Hispaniola and Cuba; a British officer or two returning from leave, and *en route* to join their regiment at Jamaica; a Spanish skipper, who was a sullen and quarrelsome fellow; a Yankee supercargo, who was somewhat loquacious and possessed of a large organ of curiosity; there was also a Frenchman of the *corps diplomatique;* but there were none apparently bound for Vera Cruz, or that part of Mexico, save himself, a Spanish lady and gentleman (neither of whom he had seen), and a couple

of wealthy sugar-planters, for the mouth of the Rio Tampico, the last port at which the *Golden Dream* was to touch ere she got up her steam again for old England and the Mersey.

The sound of a female voice singing in the saloon below and accompanying herself on a piano, lured him to the break of the poop, where the fire-buckets hung, and he lingered near the door from whence a flood of light was streaming forward on a group of weather-beaten tars and grimy engineers, who were also listening. Her voice was full, deep, and flexible; exquisitely tender too; the instrument was a very fine one, and as she played and sang, her performance was both brilliant and pleasing; but the words were so much in consonance with his own thoughts that they stirred the heart of Lennard strangely.

"Spanish, pure Spanish every word!" thought he, as he paused and bent his ear to listen. "'Todos, piensan que no quiero'—it is an old song of Pedro de Padillas."

"The flame that burns within my heart
Can find no outlet through my tongue,
And so they know not that the smart
Has sunk so deep or burned so long;
And thus they call the mighty throng
Of passion,—fleeting whim, while I
Despairing die!

"The tumult busy in my breast,
I name not; so—short-sighted men!
They call me, as they deem me, blest,
And turning oft will say again
To me, 'You never knew love's pain,
O happy, happy maid!'—while I
Despairing die!"

She was still singing the last of the six verses of which Padillas' lament is formed, when he threw off his reefing-jacket, and softly entering the saloon, passed up between the double row of tables, round which the passengers were seated in groups, the ladies sewing, reading, or chatting, the gentlemen at cards, chess, or backgammon; but all had paused for a short time to listen to the fair musician, who was seated unseen within a small after-cabin, formed between the stern and rudder-case, on each side of which an arched door gave entrance to it.

The long saloon-cabin was magnificent, and lighted by many lamps, which swung from the beams in chains of bronze. It was fitted up in a kind of Romanesque style, with arched doorways, having elaborate Tuscan pilasters, capitals, and archivolts, the keystone of each being the head

of a faun or satyr half hidden in vine-leaves. All the wood-work was of dark oak with gilded mouldings. Bronze statues in niches that were lined with mirror-glass, alternated with views of South American scenery and life, all of which Lennard hoped to see in reality; and one or two of the illustrations were historical, such as the landing of Hernan Cortez and his cavaliers amid the wondering natives who crowded that strange and sunny shore; Vasco Nunez de Balboa opening his helmet with joy on beholding the vast expanse of the Southern sea; Pizarro dying beneath the daggers of his enemies, and applying his lips to kiss the cross which his finger had traced with his own blood upon the marble floor.

Others showed the castle of San Juan de Uloa at Vera Cruz, with the volcano of Tustla in full flame; the alameda of Mexico, with black-robed monks and bare-legged arrieros, planters in broad hats and striped ponchos, galopinas at market, and donnas flirting through the sticks of their fans, with the handsome gachupins or Spaniards of the province; there was the vast plain of Toluca, with herds of wild cattle and troops of wilder horsemen careering across it amid clouds of fiery dust; here were soldiers, muleteers, and robbers fighting in a wild barranca or ravine; yonder were the vast chain of the Cordilleras, with their bases of brilliant verdure and their peaks of eternal snow, with all manner of wild animals in the foreground, from the fierce venados or giant stags of New California to the chattering monkeys who swing by their tails in the woods of Anahuac. It was an epitome of the strange land he was going to see. The rudder-case was completely framed in mirrors, and round it ran a fernery or cabinet of glass, about three feet high, filled with the rarest exotics. The little inner cabin beyond was a species of half-circular boudoir for the exclusive accommodation of the ladies. It was exquisitely fitted up, and a soft divan of crimson satin, stuffed with down feathers, was placed round it from the stern to the bulk-head on each side. Herein stood the piano, and it was not until he made his way quite up to one of the open arched entrances, that Lennard was able to see the fair performer; and while she was slowly repeating, by request of some one, the last verse, he was compelled to overhear the whispers of a whist party concerning her.

"She is awfully handsome, I can tell you," lisped Ensign Algernon Sidney Jones, of H.B.M. 5th West India Regiment, who was on his way to rejoin at Up Park camp, (and who wore his hair parted in the middle, and was more par-

ticular than a young girl about the whiteness of his hands) to a sallow-visaged planter from some Penn on the Cabaritta river.

"Oui, Monsieur," chimed in the fat little French diplomatist, who was bound for some official situation in the province of Hayti, and consequently had the inevitable red ribbon of the *Ordre* at his button-hole; "such eyes she has,—parbleu! one might light a cigar at them."

"I assisted her to grapes at dinner to-day," resumed the warrior of the 5th West India, playing with his long fair whiskers, "carefully selecting for her with the embossed scissors the sweet muscatel, which I soon found she preferred to the dark Hamburghers—by Jove I did!" and the handsome, stupid fellow laughed and looked as if he ought to be envied, and had done or said something clever.

"Ah—vrai—a good taste she has, Monsieur, even in that."

"I mean to cut in for some fun with her to-night—by Jove, I do!"

"But her guardian—her father, Monsieur," said M. Fabien, the little Frenchman, with an air of mock propriety, but with a wicked twinkle in his eye.

"Bah! the old fellow is in his berth as sick as seventeen dogs—at least the steward says so. Play, Captain Trocadero—a spade led," he added to his partner, a short and thick-set Spaniard of very sinister aspect, who had also paused in his game to listen.

"Nunca gano—demonio!" (I never win) growled the Spaniard; "Si Señor—spada," and then he added, after throwing down the card, "que bonita!—bonita? par cielo, parece tan hermosa como un angel!"*

"With her dark eyes and golden hair, she is a veritable little Luerezia Borgia!" resumed the Frenchman;—"thanks, Monsieur le Capitaine—but I trump your spade. What is her name?"

"No one knows anything except that her old friend, whatever he may be, always calls her Donna Dora," said Mr. Jones; "queer, ain't it—do you know anything of her, Mr. Nutmeg?"

"Snakes and alligators! only that she is a woman," replied the supercargo, whose country there could be no doubt about, and whom Ensign Jones viewed superciliously and with elevated eyebrows.

When Lennard entered the after-cabin or boudoir—or had penetrated so far as etiquette permitted to the door thereof,

* How pretty!—pretty? by Heaven she is beautiful as an angel!

he saw seated at the piano, with her back to him, a young girl of striking appearance. She had tossed her tiny hat with its veil and ruby feather on the divan; an Indian shawl of alternate stripes of yellow, red, and black, was carelessly thrown over her shoulders, but half-falling from them, and he could see by the reflection of the mirrors, that she had a pure and beautifully-cut profile, with dark violet eyes, and a shower of golden hair, which seemed heavy enough to bend her compact head and delicate white neck, and that she was perilously handsome and attractive.

Young ladies haye a secret and intuitive sense when a gentleman is hovering near, as if their pretty eyes could see behind as well as before; or it might be, that she caught the figure of Lennard Blair reflected in one of the many mirrors, for she turned herself sharply round on her piano stool, and a sudden exclamation of mutual recognition escaped both. She proved to be "the little foreign adventuress," as he had supposed her—the young lady of the lost tickets at the Preston Station; and starting at once from her seat, she approached him, with a blush of confusion, pride, and shame suffusing her whole face.

CHAPTER LI.

DONNA DORA DOMINGA.

"You here, sir!" she exclaimed, in her pretty foreign accent, which was mingled with the best style of an English one. "Oh, how glad I am! how happy! but how strange it is!"

"We are to be fellow-voyagers it would appear," replied Lennard, bowing politely, yet with a little coldness in his tone and constraint in his manner, which she was quick enough to perceive.

"My extreme satisfaction arises from the circumstance that we shall now be able to repay your great kindness to us at that odious and noisy railway station, where the picaros stole the Señor Saavedra's pocket-book, tickets, money, and everything. *This*," she added, turning to two ladies who sat near her, "is the kind gentleman of whom I have told you, and but for whose politeness and generosity an affront (her eyes flashed as she spoke), yes, a most terrible affront, had been put upon us. Ay de mi! what must you have thought of us—the Señor and me—never to have heard of us again?"

"Really I had other things to think of; and if some mistake——"

"The Señor Saavedra is *so* stupid! He lost your card, so we knew not where to write, or to whom to send."

"The sum was so trifling," urged Lennard.

"We advertised for you, by description, in Manchester; but never hearing from you, knew not what to do, or what to think, and thus had no opportunity of repaying——"

"Oh, say no more, I beg!" interrupted Lennard, anxious to change the subject; "the Señor Saavedra is with you?"

"Of course I could not travel without him; but he is so —so sick, poor man!"

"Mareamiento——

"So we call it in Spanish," said she, her eyes becoming brighter and fuller. "Do you know Spanish?"

"Intimately."

"Oh, we shall be quite at home here, and may speak it whenever we tire of English, or wish to say anything absurd. But I fear we shall tire of everything, for we have a long, long voyage—ah, so many thousands and thousands of miles before us! Do you go all the way to Tampico?"

"Not quite; but nearly so far," replied Lennard, while a cloud came over his face. The question brought him back to himself and his wayward fortune, though the speaker was well calculated to lure him away from all but the present, as her eyes, of the darkest violet blue—eyes that seemed black by night—all light and animation, looked into his, while the masses of fair hair that flowed over her shoulders, in golden ripples, glittered as if powdered with gold-dust. There was, moreover, an indescribable air of youthful bloom, of brightness, piquancy, and freshness, about her appearance and toilet.

"It is a pity that Hesbia could not see her now—the companion I am to have," thought Lennard, bitterly, and with something of angry triumph in his seared heart.

Born and bred during her earliest years in the sunny south, there were much of heedless joy and careless *abandon* in her air and manner; and when she laughed, she showed such teeth as one sees rarely, so closely set, so small and regular. Lennard could perceive at a glance that his new Spanish acquaintance was not an "every-day young lady;" her extremely good English puzzled him; but the reason therefore she subsequently explained.

"Had I not been so angry with Señor Saavedra, when in his impatience to be gone he tore my glove—he had not perhaps lost your card; but somehow, Señor, I am for ever in scrapes, involving in them those who are about me too. I always act first and think afterwards."

"But Donna Dora——"

"What—you know my name?"

"I merely overheard it mentioned by one of the passengers, and could not forget it."

"Why?" she asked, smiling.

"It is so characteristic—so pretty."

"My name is Isidora Dominga. I was so named for mamma, who was a Spanish lady of Tampico; but my papa is an Englishman."

"So—so," thought Lennard; "from England come the pure complexion and innocence of expression; from Spanish America, the glorious eyes and charming *abandon* of manner."

"What are you thinking of, sir?" she asked; "you were about to say something."

"Only that the steward's bell has rung twice for tea in the cabin, and that if no one has a prior right, you will allow me to lead you there."

"Thanks, señor—sir, I mean; no one here has any particular right to me," she said, laughing, "save poor José Saavedra, and he is in bed below."

And thus privileged, Lennard gave her his arm to the other end of the cabin, where the steward and his assistants, towel and salver in hand, were purveying the tea, coffee, &c.

"Eh—aw, what the deuce! if that sulky fellow don't seem to know her, and intimately too—some damned old friend, by Jove!" ejaculated Mr. Jones, of the 5th West India, as he adjusted his glass and surveyed them with an emotion of great inward annoyance.

"No chance of cutting in and winning to-night, old fellow," said his brother officer, an elderly captain, who had long since learned to prefer a quiet rubber and glass of brandy-and-water to flirtation and cream ices.

In reply to some remark of a Jamaica planter, Captain Trocadero gave a smile and a grunt, which meant to be a cough, while the Yankee supercargo concealed his quid in the deepest recesses of his lantern jaws, and would fain have planted his feet on the tea-table; but the presence of so many "darned strangers" repressed his national love of elaborate ease. Tea over, a game of chess was somehow proposed, and, at a small marble table apart, the little Donna Dora soon proved herself an expert player, for whom Lennard was no match; but the pretty tiny hands, so white and nimble (though her cheek often rested on one, which became lost amid the masses of her hair), were doubtless much more attractive to his eyes, than the bishops, knights, and rooks;

and she kept talking the whole time very gaily, but in a low confidential tone, that was not without its charm.

"And so your papa is an European!" he observed, after a pause.

"Yes—so I have been at schools in Paris and in England," she replied; and then with all the garrulous confidence of girlhood, proceeded to tell him all about herself. "I have relations in Britain somewhere—but where I don't know."

"Could you not discover them?"

"Their addresses and papa's letters were lost in a ship on the way to me. Besides, over the sea in America, we soon lose sight of Europe and all there—it is such a small place. Play your king, please."

"Why, señora?"

"Because you have made a false move."

"And you have friends in Britain?"

"Yes—dear papa has many business friends in Liverpool and elsewhere. I was to have visited them, and, if possible, sought out his relations, but there was not time given me. I am a great pet at home, being the last of several children, for all my little brothers and sisters died of the yellow fever. A sudden illness of papa's is now hurrying us away, and I may never, never again see the country we have left. Not that I care much—it is always so cloudy, and all over England the sun invariably sets in mist."

"So you left hurriedly?"

"Yes; letters were waiting us at Manchester—which place, but for your kindness, we might not have reached so readily."

"I parry your check, señora; you say *we*—have you a party with you?"

"Oh, no, only the Señor José Saavedra—he and I."

"And—and he—" stammered Lennard, still watching the pretty hands rather than his chessmen, when the young lady laughed, and threw back her hair with both hands, exclaiming,

"What are you thinking of? How oddly you play? Don't you see that you are touching your men, and without playing them going to *others* quite gravely? That you make false moves, yet never play your king, and don't know when you are checkmated?"

"I beg your pardon—pray excuse me," said Lennard, who indeed was too much abstracted on one hand, and bewildered by the young lady's *espièglerie* on the other, to attend much to a game requiring such deep application as the knightly one of chess.

"And this Señor Saavedra," he resumed.

"What of him?"

"He seems to exercise some control over your movements."

"Control! the old *bobo!* I should think not," said she, laughing; "he is full of the old Spanish—or rather the Morisco-Spanish—idea of keeping women and girls under lock and key, like wine or sweetmeats; and would very possibly faint if he saw me sitting thus with you now."

"Why so?"

"He is my padrino."

"Oh—your god-father!"

"Yes—that is all?"

"I feared that he—he was——"

"What—you surely never thought that he was my—husband?"

"Yes, señora."

She burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, and then said, while tears of fun flashed in her eyes, "Why should you fear it? but I would no more marry him than—than *you!*"

From which terrible impossibility Lennard came to the conclusion that she was either betrothed or married—the former, most probably, from her extreme youth—and then thought no more of the matter. He was pleased to reflect that he would have a delightful companion during the long voyage. It proved somewhat longer than any one on board anticipated. However, lest he might labour under any further mistake as to her "padrino," she informed him that the Señor José Saavedra was an old business friend of her father, who had taken advantage of his return from a visit to Europe, to act as her guardian, escort, or escudero, until she reached her own home in Mexico. This naturally led to a reference to Mexican life and scenery; and when their game was over—and a pretty protracted game it was, so much so, that Ensign Algernon Sidney Jones sought consolation with a soothing weed on deck—as they promenaded the saloon or cabin, she explained to him all that the somewhat garish landscapes, empanelled round it, meant.

There was the great castle of San Juan de Ulloa: she had been in it twenty times! That was the Santiago Fort opposite, with the Vergara Bay, so full of shipping, between; and that was the desolate marsh of Gallego to the north, covered with mangoes and brushwood. She had seen that volcano, in the background, often spouting red and yellow flames; and her papa had such a pretty country house not far from its base. Those wild horsemen, with brandished spear, with looped lasso, and levelled musket, scouring

across the plain of Toluca, were in pursuit of the herds of horned cattle that fled in clouds of dust before them ; and the savage animal, lurking in a corner among the tall, slender sugar-canes and big yellow gourds, was a jaguar. That magnificent double row of trees—trees to which those of Europe were as cabbage-stalks—was the Paseo of Mexico. Those men, riding the weary mules, and having such long beards, with their legs and arms in bandages, were invalidos, poor soldiers, returning from war, with the full permission of a generous Republic to beg for the rest of their days. The young girl, whose beauty was so much enhanced by the red umbrella held over her head by an old man, was his wife. He was a ranchero, or farmer, and the demure old dame behind, in black, with a high comb and long cane, was her dueña, and so forth ; but in time Lennard began to know all those people and places for himself.

Then pleasantly she bade him adieu for the night, and retired to the ladies' cabin. He remained for a time in the saloon, looking at the pictures they had examined, or it might be, perhaps, that a sense of her presence hovered there. Then he joined the gentlemen who were smoking on deck, and remembered, suddenly, that during all the past two hours he had spent with the fair stranger—thrown into her society completely, and as people can only be on board of ship—he had never once recalled his past disappointments or his sorrows.

CHAPTER LII.

CAPTAIN TROCADERO.

CHANCING to ask, of a promenader on deck, for a light to his cigar, he found himself face to face with the captain, Luke Maynard, a pleasant, lively, and gentlemanly man, with wonderfully little that was nautical in his air or appearance.

"A light—with pleasure, sir," said he, and held forth his cigar.

"Thanks—by the way, captain, who are those Spanish folks you have on board—passengers?"

"I can guess whom you mean—the young lady with the golden hair, and the old gentleman with the huge mustachios."

"Exactly—I have not seen him yet, but I believe he is on board."

"I think you might have found it all out by this time. You were together a good spell, and must have turned it to account," said the captain, drily, and laughing as he thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his reefing-jacket, and turned his back to the night wind. "However, Donna Dora and Señor José Saavedra are rich folks, hailing from Tampico, or some other port on the Gulf of Mexico."

"Rich, I suppose?"

"Ay, rich as a Jew! This ship cost above one hundred thousand pounds; a better was never built even on the Clyde; her father could build and launch two or three such and never miss the money—at least so says old Trocadero, and he should know all about it, if any one does."

"Wealthy are they? money—always money, as a virtue above all human virtues!" muttered Lennard, as the captain went forward to hail the officer of the watch and give some orders. "Well, with all her charms, and the little Spaniard has money, the events of the last month have rendered *me* proof against her without that warning. And so the Captain Trocadero knows all about them, does he? Now that I think of it, where have I heard that name before?"

After a few moments' reflection, it flashed upon him, and hurrying to his state-room, he opened his portmanteau and sought for Envoyse's letter of instructions. There it was, packed up with the torn glove—the tiny kid glove—of the Spanish lady, which oddly enough, he had, perhaps inadvertently, stuffed in with his other property, and which he now placed in his pocket-book. He was requested to make particular inquiries as to the circulation of rumours to the effect that three large ships belonging to Vere and Co. had been nefariously and feloniously scuttled in South American waters, by a skipper named Trebucio Trocadero, for the alleged purpose of realizing the insurances effected thereon; concerning the failure of a house in Costa Rica and non-payments elsewhere, all of which were stated with a singular vagueness; and finally he was to start a branch of the firm of Vere and Co. in Vera Cruz, with two Spanish and two English clerks, or such others as he might find necessary, &c.

"Trebucio Trocadero," said Lennard, involuntarily, as he re-entered the saloon and glanced towards a table at the further end, where the Spaniard was intently perusing a Spanish shipping gazette, and imbibing from time to time some cold brandy-and-water.

He was a short, thick-set, piratical-looking ruffian, of singularly uninviting appearance; in visage swarthy as a negro,

beetle-browed, with large frontal bones, a hooked nose, and square, angular jaw. His black hair was becoming grizzled, but was thick as the fur of a bear. He had enormous round shoulders and arms, every muscle and fibre of which had been developed to their utmost tension by tallying on ropes and hard work of all kinds; he had powerful bandy legs and large hands, resembling bunches of knotted rope that had been dipped in tar. An occasional twitching of his thick sensual mouth, and a covert expression of his small fierce eyes, seemed to indicate much of a cunning, savage, and cowardly nature.

Such was this pleasant Caballo Marino, or regular old sea-horse, of whom we shall hear more anon, and who now raised his eyes from his tattered shipping gazette to fix them in stern inquiry on Lennard, who with perfect coolness drew in a chair and seated himself at the opposite side of the table.

"Excuse me, Captain Trocadero," said he in Spanish, that was so pure as to make that personage open his eyes very wide; "permit me, without intrusion, to make your acquaintance."

"Por que, Señor?" was the surly response.

"I have one or two questions to ask with your permission," replied Lennard, still politely.

"On nautical matters?"

"Yes."

"That is well; I don't know much about the land—Dios no quiero!"

"You have been much at sea?"

"Ever since boyhood, when I ran away from Cadiz as a cabin boy on board a slaver."

"You know something of the Straits of Bahama, perhaps?"

"Si, Señor—every island, rock, and key of them, from the great Fresh-water-ponds of Imagua to the Florida Reefs—a matter of two hundred Spanish leagues. Motre de Dios! Many a tearing pampero I've weathered there, and never worse than in the windward passage between Tortuga and Cuba."

"Did you command a ship of five hundred tons that was lost last summer on the Salt Key Bank in the Santarem Channel?"

"No!" replied the other, with knitted brows and flashing eyes.

"Nor another that was lost on the Cayo Verde, south-eastward of the Great Bahama Bank?"

"No—no—I tell you no! Santo de los Santos!" he

added, with blasphemous fury, while smiting the table with both his clenched hands, "I never lost a ship in my life!"

"Strange; and your name Trebucio Trocadero?"

"Yes; Trebucio Trocadero—once of Cadiz, and now anywhere to where the sea or Satanas may send him. But, talking of names, what is yours, my fine fellow?"

"I do not answer questions that are asked in such a tone," replied Lennard, haughtily.

"Then keep your name to yourself; but what the devil are you?"

"Administrador—agent for Vere & Co., of Liverpool—as well as partner in the firm."

An expression of surprise and half-incredulity stole over Trocadero's face for a moment, and his manner betrayed hesitation.

"Pho!" said he, after a pause, "I don't care if you were the Governor of all Mexico. Par Dios! Why all these questions? I can only tell you," he added, with a steady glance of mysterious and unutterable ferocity, "that if you don't happen to be lost overboard in the night, I shall have you ashore for this on the first land we see, and there try which of us is the best man, in any fashion you like, with pistol, knife, or knuckleduster."

"Come, come, gentlemen, what the deuce is up between you," said Captain Maynard, of the *Golden Dream*, who with others had drawn near them unperceived; "remember that I will permit no quarrelling on board my ship. A challenge? It is well the ladies have all retired—a most unseemly row this would have been to them!"

"I merely asked Captain Trocadero two simple questions concerning certain wrecks in the Bahama Straits, and he flew into a fury which leads me to suppose that he knows more than he cares to admit. If I do him wrong," said Lennard, who deemed it prudent for the time to dissemble alike his anger and his suspicions, "it was without intention—if I have unwittingly offended him I shall indeed be sorry."

"You're a good fellow, Mr. Blair," said Captain Maynard; "come shake hands on't, my old Buccanier!"

But Trocadero gave Lennard a withering scowl as he started from the table and turned away; and during the remainder of the voyage, which was a long one, they carefully avoided each other.

"Beware of Trocadero," whispered Captain Maynard; "he's a dangerous kind of fellow, and not likely to be bothered by scruples."

Convinced that there was some mystery in all this anger

of the Spaniard, Lennard was about once more to peruse the letters of Abel Envoyse, when his arm was twitched by Mr. Jaleel Nutmeg, the Yankee supercargo.

"Sir-ee," said that personage, who had extracted a plug of tobacco from his mouth, and was airing it on the point of a jack-knife; "I'm gwine to liquor up," he drawled through his nose; "will you jine me in a cocktail?"

"Thanks—I've been nettled a little."

"Worried a bit I can see, by that old Mexican cuss, Trocadero."

"Yes; I was simply endeavouring——"

"To take his soundings; wal—he's a py-ratical old rowdy, if ever there was one. Blow'd if he wouldn't pass for twin brother to Captain Kidd."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; so beware of him, stranger—beware of him, for he's half bear, half alligator, with a good cross of the cobra; so I'd leave him and his navigation alone."

"You have been listening to our conversation?"

"I rather guess I have—to every word. Now, stranger, what's yer bisiness out there about the Bahama Channel?"

"I've nothing to do with the Bahama Channel."

"You're one o' them critters as travel to write books?"

"I am not," replied Lennard, curtly.

"How do you make your livelihood—get fixings—your plunder and all that?"

Lennard laughed at the coolness of the American.

"Wal—I don't want to be curious," he resumed; "but come and let us have our cocktail before that darned Britisher swell in the biled rag comes below," for so he termed Ensign Jones, who, as the vessel had been but a short time at sea, showed as yet an unusual amount of shirt-front (the boiled rag in question), with magnificent studs, always dressing carefully for dinner out of deference to the ladies, and to the great disgust of Mr. Jaleel Nutmeg, who appeared in a perpetual state of dishabille and general disorder of collar and hair.

"Ah," he resumed, "for all the show the crittur makes, I guess that captain, or whatever he is, of Queen Victoria's niggers, may be almighty poor; there'll be no pickings or stealings in her service as in that of Uncle Sam, or that of his new friend the Emperor of all the Roosias."

CHAPTER LIII.

OF A DREAM THAT WAS NOT GOLDEN.

THE weather was fine, the wind generally fair, and the great ocean steamer went on her voyage prosperously. After Señor José Saavedra came on deck and found his "sea-legs" —which only enabled him to stagger to and fro, and to grasp wildly at ropes, belaying-pins, or any one who chanced to be near him, whenever the vessel rolled or plunged—Lennard had seldom an opportunity of speaking long with Donna Dora Dominga, as the little escudero, muffled in an ample black poncho bordered with red, and having a tasselled cap surmounting his tawny visage and enormous black mustachios, was ever on guard and suspiciously hovering nigh, like a character in a melodrama rather than one of real life. On one occasion they contrived to exchange their vignettes, for the Donna had an album and was anxious to show her papa a likeness of the gentleman who had come so timely to their aid at Preston ; and by effecting this important barter publicly under the Señor's angry eyes, deprived it of all appearance of subtlety, and really none existed. On an examination of those trifling—but often, according to circumstances, ties, or separation, interesting—little sun-pictures, they found that the resemblance of each to the other in face was alike strange and striking! Yet Lennard was dark-haired and tall—she, fair-haired and petite. There was evidently a world of romance in the heart of this impulsive Spanish girl, so she laughed excessively at the coincidence, though surly Señor José saw no likeness between them whatever.

The passengers were all usually on deck now ; even the most inveterate whist-players found no excuse for lingering below ; the sun was so bright, the sea so calm, and ever swelling past in long blue glassy rollers ; chess, so far as regarded Lennard and the donna, was an interdicted game, now that her watchful padrino—to the regret of the former —had fully emerged from his cell or state-room, where for hours he had lain under the hands of the steward, alternately cursing the sea and imploring our Lady of Guadaloupe. The light dresses of the ladies fluttered on the poop, making all seem gay on board ; the odour of cigars incessantly floated upward from the main-deck, where the gentlemen generally promenaded, pausing now and anon at the break aft to exchange a few words with the fair passengers who were seated on the poop rails, which they generally preferred

to seats between the guns or cushions on the after-gratings ; and there crochet, tatting, and novels were the order of the day, till the steward's bell announced a meal, causing them all to rise like a covey of partridges and seek the assistance of the nearest gentleman's hand or arm for the arduous descent of Jacob's ladder—the best staircase in the world to exhibit to advantage a pretty foot and well-turned ankle.

And daily some new wonder of the deep occurred to excite interest or afford conversation ; now it was the *sargasso*, the green bunches of Florida Gulf weed, which floated past, shining like gold in the sunlight, or phosphorescent and white under the colder beams of the moon, for then Corvo and Flores, the most western of the Azores, lay distant some twenty leagues or so upon their lee. Then came the catching of the first dolphin, when it was found, to the disappointment of all, that its changing hues were more brilliant and beautiful when *in* the water, than when dying out of it ; the silvery flying fish would start from the bosom of one green wave to vanish in the rising slope of another, and ever and anon, no matter how far from land, there were old Mother Cary's chickens in brown flocks, and the stormy petrel so called after St. Peter by the pious mariners of old, hovering perhaps round a piece of drifting wreck that was covered with sea ware and barnacles ; and all such little incidents, with hailing an occasional craft that was homeward bound, formed most animated subjects for discussion in their narrow circle, especially for a lady passenger of uncertain age, who wore a false front and blue spectacles, and who, as she kept a diary, perpetually worried Captain Maynard and his mates as to where the ship was "now ;" and so the first week passed on, till the Saturday night came with its fun and fiddling in the forecastle, its dances and songs under the leech of the foresail ; music of a more choice nature in the cabin, with the toasts of "sweethearts and wives," and "all ships at sea ;" and then Sunday followed, when a church was rigged on the poop, with stools, hassocks, and spare bunting ; Jack appeared in his best jacket and ducks, and Kit Kentledge, the boatswain, piped all hands to prayers, while overhead the scarlet union floated out in honour of the day, though there was no eye abroad upon the waste of waters to see it, save One.

The recollection of Trocadero's strange phrase, or half-threat, "*if* you don't fall overboard in the night," occurred from time to time to Lennard's memory, with an unpleasant effect. The words unmistakably contained a dark hint, that if a feasible opportunity occurred, the captain was quite ca-

pable of ridding himself by a most summary process of any one he disliked, or whom he suspected of holding a key to some secret act or generally unknown portion of his nautical career.

When few men were on deck, in a dark night, with the wind blowing hard, and a heavy sea on, this muscular ruffian, at a moment when unseen, by a blow and a hoist over to leeward might easily render Lennard's berth an empty one, and blot out his existence for ever; so, knowing this, the young man resolved to avoid him as much as possible, and even was so careful as to bolt his state-room door in the night, because that of Trocadero opened on the opposite side of the saloon. As for a duel when ashore, he never contemplated such a result; but, if attacked, was resolved to shoot down Trocadero like a dog, and without mercy. But so full was he of those suspicions, and the anxious thoughts the daily presence of this truculent Spaniard inspired, that one night he dreamed that the covert threat had been put in execution, and that he had actually been knocked off the taffrail, headlong into the sea by Trocadero! Gasping for breath, he felt himself rise on the summit of a wave only to see the ship leaving him behind, for he was whirling helplessly in the white eddy of the waves, amid her wake, on which the varied lights of the cabin windows streamed. Above these, over the taffrail, and the stern boat which swung there, he could see the ferocious Trocadero, pale with fury in the moonlight, the veins in his forehead knotted and swollen, his thick lips twitching, his huge hands clenched.

Lennard strove to shriek for aid, but the sound died away from his powerless tongue. Why should this man exult in his destruction, or seek for it? What wrong had he ever done him? And there now was Donna Dora (how strangely like Hesbia the violet-eyed and bright-haired Spanish girl looked!) She screamed and held forth her hands to him; but at that moment Trocadero tore her back, while he—the victim—floated away astern into the waste of darkness and of death, for the water seemed to close over him! Then, with a painfully nervous start, he awoke to find himself snug in his own berth on board the *Golden Dream*, the first beams of the night lamp that swung from a beam struggling for mastery with the fainter rays of early morning that stole through the little round yoke in the side of the vessel, against which the waves at times were surging. He was in his own berth—true! But what other sounds were those he heard? A hand trying to undo the latch- to unfasten the brass bolt on the door of his little cabin?

"Who is there?" he demanded, and sprung to his feet.

But there was no response; so, arming himself with a boot-jack, he threw open the door, and looked forth just in time to see that of Trocadero's cabin closing on the opposite side of the saloon, which was almost dark, as only one lamp burned now, of the many that swung from the beams. Re-closing and fastening his door more carefully than ever, Lennard looked at his watch.

"Morning is at hand; so—so—I have now had a double warning, and more than ever shall I closely watch that scoundrel Trocadero!"

The result of his watching was, that the mystery concerning the Spaniard greatly increased. Next day, betimes, and before any of the other passengers were up, he found himself face to face with Captain Trocadero on the poop, where however they took opposite sides, the Spaniard keeping to windward when he proceeded to make up a cigarito and to light it, heedless or unwitting that his smallest action was watched by Lennard Blair.

Having made full arrangements for his morning whiff, he crumpled up and tossed away the remainder of the paper in which he had rolled the tobacco, and went forward among the morning watch, as he generally preferred the society of the forecastle to that of the cabin. The fragment of paper did not, as he supposed, fly to leeward; but fell at the feet of Lennard, who at once took it up, not caring whether the man at the wheel observed him; and on inspection found it to be the upper portion of a letter—a letter to Trocadero—and in the handwriting of Mr. Vere!

"Vere in correspondence with this man—the very rascal accused of scuttling his ships, and concerning whom I am to make inquiries?" thought Lennard; "what can all this mean?"

So this man had actually been in Liverpool and in direct communication with Mr. Vere, as this torn missive proved, for it was dated from London, and only *two* days before the sailing of the *Golden Dream!* It was simply the commencement of a letter, the contents of which it would be vain to conjecture; but Lennard had now many painful misgivings, which he sought fruitlessly to soothe or analyze; while he carefully consigned the fragment to the inner recesses of his pocket-book, the result of a mere business habit, perhaps, which he had acquired in the service of Vere & Co.

CHAPTER LIV.

EN VOYAGE.

Now Donna Dominga came on deck, alone and the first of all the ladies; so he hastened to offer her his arm, and to lead her to a seat improvised for her, with cushions on the deck gratings aft, where he wrapped her shawl around her. The morning was a lovely one; sea and sky alike so blue and so bright that save for a speck or two at the horizon, the eye failed to detect where water ended and the thin faint clouds began, while through the ambient air, the dark smoke of the funnels could be traced for more than twenty miles astern over the water which the ship had traversed in the dark.

"Ah—buenos dias de Dios á vuestra Donna Dora," had been Lennard's first greeting when she came on deck, as he lifted his hat at the risk of its going hopelessly over to leeward.

"Good morning, sir," she replied, laughing; "but pray speak English, for, a little time and I shall hear nothing but Spanish—yet why do I say so, when I love my native language so dearly?" she added, while shaking out the skirts of her pretty and becoming dress (but all her dresses seemed pretty and most becoming), and seating herself somehow as to show more than usual of her handsome ankles cased in tight white stockings, her little feet and tiny kid boots. "English, papa says, is the language properly of commerce."

"And so in English I shall hope to make my fortune—money; but in Spanish——"

"Bueno! what will you make in Spanish?"

"Love," said Lennard, colouring, as he gallantly lifted his wide-awake.

"Then don't let us talk Spanish by any means," said she, with fun lurking in the corner of her eyes.

"A little flirt, I fear," thought Lennard, as she sat very demurely fanning herself, though the morning air was quite cool, yet pleasant. Soured by the memory of Hesbia, he deemed himself proof against the charms of the fair Spaniard and even *almost* mockingly made love to her till—till there came a time when he found that the game was growing too perilous, for she was altogether unlike any other young lady he had met; she was so full of piquant girlish spirit and beauty, with the softness, the dimples, and the purity of a child, and yet in coolness and determination would act like a woman of years and experience if occasion required.

With all her knowledge of her own great beauty, the

Spanish girl could see that the respectful, though admiring glance of the grave, almost sad-eyed Lennard Blair, was very different from the cool inspection, the dilettante curiosity of Ensign Jones, of little M. Fabien the French Chevalier, of Mr. Nutmeg, and others who passed her on the poop, and who sought to establish with her that which may be termed an acquaintanceship of the eye.

Lennard, on his part, now found himself looking for her first in the morning, and watching her till the hour of retiring, when he would walk for hours on that side of the deck where she lay, a piece of attention with which she would willingly have dispensed, even had she known who the assiduous promenader was.

"Why does the face of this girl haunt me?" he began to ask himself; "she is a total stranger, yet she fills my mind with strange impressions of previous acquaintance with, or knowledge of her—a fancy that we must have met long before that momentary meeting at Preston; and so her face grows on me, as if foreshadowing that it might become a good or evil star in time to come. What! mooning again, Lennard! Pshaw!"

But that bright little face, with its beautiful eyes—and truly "haunting eyes" they were—came between him and the blue sea when he gazed dreamily at the far horizon; it came out of the darkness of his cot at night; it mingled with that ugly dream of Trebucio Trocadero, and would not be thrust aside, though the fact of its being in his mind's eye was, he believed, a species of treason to one who had rejected and cruelly trifled with him.

"Let me not think thus," he would say to himself; "let me not give way to this new fancy, which may so soon ripen and expand in the narrow compass of a voyage; for what will be the purpose, the use, or the fate of that fancy when the voyage is over, and the hour of separation comes?"

Though Donna Dora was fond of having a circle around her on deck, or when at the piano in the after-cabin (especially when her old Mentor was near), she generally preferred the society of Lennard, whose knowledge of her native language was a great bond between them; thus some of the Spanish gentlemen of colour scowled at him very undisguisedly, forgetting for the time, perhaps, that the fact of their being half-bloods, quadroons, or even octoroons, rendered them ineligible society for her, according to etiquette in some of the native provinces. Ensign Jones and his brother officers were unpleasantly dry to him; the Yankee supercargo voted him a "darned unsociable spoon," and the

officers of the ship, as the youths in brass buttons and semi-naval caps designated themselves, quizzed them both, and averring that "they mortally hated *him*," indulged in various speculations and schemes by which to put some ridiculous affront upon him before they were under the Tropic of Cancer. Then there were times when Señor José Saavedra took her to task, saying—"Has it never occurred to you, Señora, that this young man, of whom we know nothing, is not a proper companion for you?"

"I hope he is not an improper companion, Padrino mio," she would reply, with a smiling but reddened face; so that ere long the piquancy of secret intelligence, the most dangerous element of all, began to steal into their intimacy.

Lennard's knowledge of the Spanish language formed, we have said, a peculiar link between him and the young Donna; but someway it came to pass that they always lapsed into more prosaic English when her father's confidential friend, old Señor Saavedra, who knew it *not*, drew near or joined them. Why was this? Their eloquent eyes might have given an answer; but as yet no serious conversation had taken place between them, and there were some features in Lennard's bearing which seemed to pique the curiosity and excite the imagination of Donna Dora.

Why, thought she, was this young man so reserved and grave, so sweet and sad in eye and manner at times;—so obstinate and cynical at others—to men especially? What had happened to him? What had cast a shadow on his life already—what but love, of course? Poor fellow—and he looked so handsome and drew long sighs so interestingly when he thought no one observed him! Yet, but for the romance of her nature, this interesting youth might only be worried by the toothache, as Señor José once ventured to suggest, to the great disgust of Donna Dora. There was, she averred to the ladies, when in their own cabin they nightly discussed the merits of their brother voyagers—a dreamy expression in his eyes quite calculated to interest, and they agreed with her, some suggesting that he was an author probably, or an artist, a musician—"or a lunatic," added the fair diarist who wore the false front and blue goggles. But Dora felt herself irresistibly attracted, she scarcely knew why or how.

And how was it with Lennard? Why did he feel an unusual interest in this girl? She was beautiful certainly, sparkling, and so forth; but was he "about to fall in love again," he asked himself, "to become as great an ass as before?" No—he hoped not! It was only propinquity, which,

like opportunity, is so often the devil's game—his loneliness in the world—the steamer, &c. Surely he had enough to think of—his late sorrow—the mystery of Vere and Trocadero—his future prospects in a strange land; and so he blushed for himself and shrunk with dismay from the fear that he was about to feel, or had already felt, an interest too tender in Donna Dora, and from that moment resolved to act like a Stoic, and surpass Zeno himself; but alas! for his rivalry with him of Citium, for when Señor José retired to bed early that night, growling with a fit of lumbago, and when the Donna came on deck as the moon rose to shed a splendour on the glassy sea, and when she expressed a wish to peep into the engine-room and see the mysteries thereof, the hand and arm of Lennard Blair were the first proffered to assist her down Jacob's ladder, and to lead her forward along the deck.

CHAPTER LV.

CONCERNING THE STARS AND A CERTAIN TORN GLOVE.

THEY were now almost in tropical regions, and the night was one of fully tropical loveliness. The great steamer was gliding through the water at her utmost speed, with everything on her that would draw, even to a main-royal, for she was shiprigged, and went easily through the water, the revolution of her enormous paddle-wheels producing little more than a monotonous hum. The breeze was soft and steady; her towering shadow went far away to leeward, out upon the moonlit sea, and even the smoke of her funnels was reflected there as in a mirror. Immediately below the counter on either quarter the water was dark as ink, and each time she gave a kind of plunge when cleaving the long rollers in succession, the bights of her wake met together astern in double eddies that were full of phosphorescent and silvery light. The sky was full of stars, and all of a wondrous bright blue; but though beautiful the night, there were very few passengers on the poop, where the fifth mate, who had the watch, with his hands thrust into the side-pockets of his reefing-jacket, trod to and fro, giving, from time to time, a look aloft, another to windward, a third at the binnacle, and anon, a fourth over the quarter, as if he expected something novel to appear in that direction.

The men of the second dog-watch (which extends from six to eight p.m.) were gathered in a knot forward, spinning yarns, jesting, and now and then breaking forth into songs

and choruses ; and once the clear mellow voice of Kit Kentledge, the boatswain, who was a great favourite with the crew, rang out upon the night, as he sang an old Buccaneer ditty:

"Oh sweet it was in Avis,
To catch the landward breeze,
A'swing, with good tobacco,
In a hammock 'neath the trees,
With a coal-black lass to fan you,
Whilst you listened to the roar
Of breakers on the bar outside,
That never reached the shore."

"Bueno—how pretty !" exclaimed Dora, pausing near the long-boat which was on its chocks over the main-hatch and well lashed to ring-bolts in the deck amidships. She listened with her hand uplifted, as if she would hush even the stillness while the seaman sung.

Ruffled and wafted out by the wind, her golden hair seemed of greater volume than usual, as her shawl fell from her head over her shoulders ; and in the moonlight there was a wonderful whiteness in her uplifted hand, that reminded Lennard of the white rose-leaf, just as her cheek did of the pink of a great shell when it blends so softly with the hue of snow—if snow can be said to have a hue. As they were peeping through the grating of the open hatchway into the engine-room, where the mighty powers of locomotion were in full play and in all their bravery of polished steel and brass, and shining in the fiery glow that streamed occasionally through the jaws of the furnace ; while grimy men went to and fro upon the iron floor below, Lennard looked upon the bright and intelligent face of the young girl who clung to his arm, he felt the pressure of the little hand which closed upon it—as if the vastness, the power, the tremendous clanking and the general air of mystery down there appalled her, and while the touch of her hand sent a thrill to his heart some strange and tumultuous thoughts occurred to him.

"She is beautiful and winning, but she is rich, while I, in circumstances, am narrower than ever. A woman played with my heart and trifled cruelly with it ; why then should I shrink from trifling with this girl ?" So was he wont to think in his cynical moments : but *now*—and intimacies ripen soon under the same roof, sooner still on board of ship—in such a time as this, under the happy smile of the bright little Spaniard, such bitter communings were forgotten or thrust aside as coarse and ungenerous. Was it that he had acquired the habit of loving something, and that there was a void in his heart requiring to be filled?

Was it that some absurd thought of avenging himself on the sex lured him into loving now; and if so, why make this young girl the victim? She had more heart and was full of deeper thought than Hesbia Vere. Lennard Blair could remember that *her* conversation had been chiefly of people, gaiety, racing meets and hunts and balls, the change of fashions and of dress; with seldom a remark about the past or the future. Hesbia lived for the present alone, and in that spirit had dismissed him from her heart; and now the memory of all she had made him endure prompted him to give full scope to his admiration—shall we say his growing passion—for the young Spanish girl. Hesbia Vere had cast him off for ever, and all their ties were broken now, so surely as the deep blue water rolled between them.

From the formidable but somewhat prosaic mysteries of the engine-room Donna Dora turned her face to the stars which shone brightly overhead, spangling the entire sky from the horizon to the zenith, in some places clustering in constellations which exceeded all we ever see of brilliance in Europe; and new planets seemed to flash out all the more brightly when viewed through the dark squares of the rattlins, from amid the streaming smoke of the funnels, or when seen by glimpses under the arched leech of a swelling sail.

"How glorious they are—how gloriously beautiful," she exclaimed, looking up, while her eyes beamed with enthusiasm, and her lips seemed to quiver, for she had a finely cut and sensitive-looking little mouth, not unlike Lennard's own; and hence perhaps the resemblance in their photographs.

"Beware of cold—I would not for worlds that you caught one," said Lennard, in a low and earnest voice, while looking into her eyes and drawing her shawl again over her head, he confined the soft tresses within it, and with her brooch fastened it under her chin. He felt her cheek touch his fingers during this process, and more than once her hands met his; and finally he drew an arm through his own and gently pressed it there, as if to reassure her and guide her steps, as he led her to the ship's side, where they could see the stars, and the ocean with all its waves careering fast astern.

Lennard Blair knew right well that there is a scale in the order of familiarity, and that much may be said or done without offence being taken or reprehension given; but he trembled already to avail himself of the present pleasing situation, and somewhat nervously he began to talk about the stars, while thinking only of Dora's eyes.

"Never in Europe—certainly not in England—did you ever, Señora, see Orion's belt shine thus, or the Serpent flash so brightly about his foot."

"And I do so love to see the steersman look at the stars, as that man at the wheel is doing now. It seems to me that he trusts to them quite as much as to his compass when guiding us over this mighty waste of trackless water—guiding us so unerringly to our home."

"To your home in the sunny south, Donna Dora; mine lies far away—if indeed I have a home in the world."

She looked at him earnestly for a moment, and then resumed the current of her own thoughts.

"To me the skill seems wonderful that teaches our timonero—our helmsman—to steer by night, 'to read'—says some author—'the vast book ever open above us, which we call the heavens, and on whose azure leaf God has written with letters of diamond.'"

Then passing at once from grave to gay, she began to hum and half sing,—

"Señora! estrella luciente," &c.

As she sang dreamily thus, her eyes chanced to meet those of Lennard regarding her fixedly, tenderly, and with an expression that made her pause. It was a mournful glance, in which anger and scrutiny seemed strangely to mingle, for many thoughts were at that moment conflicting in his heart.

"You look sad, Mr. Blair," said she; "you have some secret sorrow, I am sure."

"Perhaps."

"All the ladies on board say that you have!"

"They watch me then?" said he, smiling.

"Of course we do," was the naïve reply; "you regret leaving home; is it the *mal du pays?*"

"No; I have no such regret now."

"Why, señor?"

"I have no home to leave," was the cynical response.

"Friends then?"

"I have none—they are all dead."

"Then you sorrow for some one who loved you?" persisted the pretty querist.

"I do not—sorrow is past."

"For some one you love then—I must discover your secret."

His lip curled slightly—quivered perhaps, but he only sighed and looked away.

"Of what are you thinking, señor?"

"The beauty of—of—the sea to-night."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, señora!"

There was another pause, after which Donna Dora found that she must again take the initiative or the conversation might languish.

"How quiet—almost taciturn you have become! If you have a secret grief, I am so sorry for having jested about it, or hinted of it, so pray pardon me. Or," she added, laughing, "is it only that which the French so happily term *la solidité des Anglais*, that affects your manner?"

"Perhaps—but I don't happen to be an Anglais."

"Are you a North American?" she asked, abruptly.

"No, señora."

"What then?"

"I happen to be a Scotsman—Escoto."

"En verdad! But you are not dressed in the same fashion of the Scots I saw represented in Lucia di Lammermuir at Paris?"

"I should think not, and hope never to be," replied Lennard, laughing, as he thought of the silk tights and general absurdity of the operatic costume she referred to.

"Escozia," she repeated, thoughtfully; "I have read all Scott's novels about that country; and I have heard papa speak of it—he was certainly there in his youth."

"Oh, very likely! all the world seem to go there once a year now."

"But what makes you usually so thoughtful?"

"An idea."

"And this idea—I must know it?" said she, laughing.

"Why are women so fickle?"

"Because men are so strange, perhaps; but I make a wrong admission, and must deny your premises."

"Are they not sometimes false?"

"You are actually bitter, señor! But men are so seldom true."

"I could be true as steel—true as time, or as the sun itself to—to one who loved me!"

"Heavens!" said she, laughing louder, "you are quite carried away; señor, do please to preserve your senses."

Lennard had begun impetuously; but, suddenly changing his tactics, he opened his pocket-book, and said, while producing the torn relic of their casual meeting, which, by a fortuitous chance, had been preserved among his papers:

"See how I have kept this glove—you remember it?"

She flushed scarlet, and Lennard coloured too; for the rogue felt that he was rather acting a part.

"I was very angry then," said Dora, growing pale again. "Ah, what must you have thought of me! But how did you come to preserve such a thing as this—you never could have hoped to meet *me* again?"

"Another, by a happy chance, preserved it for me," he replied, somewhat unwilling to play a card so false, though the young girl—who quite recognized her glove—seemed both puzzled and gratified.

Her left arm was pressed within his, and against his heart. He was actually stealing her left hand within his own, and he was looking alternately into the shrinking soft dark eyes, and at the parted cherry lips. A new love was filling fast his heart. The memory of the old, ill-fated one was gone, and that beating heart seemed flying to his head!

An avowal of esteem, of deep interest, of love, or of some kind, was trembling on his lips, when it was arrested by the appearance of a huge dark visage, which appeared above the gunnel of the long-boat close by, and by a sound between a cough and a laugh that came most gratingly on their ears, as Captain Trocadero, who had been sleeping, or more probably lurking and watching them, suddenly upreared his squat figure from amid the lumber which usually fills a long-boat on deck, and leisurely proceeded to clamber out.

With a gesture of impatience Donna Dora snatched the torn glove from Lennard's hand, and tossed it away to leeward, saying—"Oh, señor, how could you think of preserving such a trashy relic as an old glove? It is too absurd!"

As he led her back to the gaily-lighted saloon, Lennard scowled at the Spanish skipper and thought—while his strange dream of the other night came vividly to memory—"Disgusting devil! but for him—well, there is a glorious opportunity gone for ever!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE PADRINO TAKES LENNARD TO TASK.

THE watchful Señor José Saavedra was now daily on deck again, or in the saloon cabin, quietly observant of his charge; so Lennard found the difficulty—almost the impossibility—of reverting to their last conversation or bringing it back to the point so nearly gained, and lost through the sudden apparition of the truculent Trocadero, who now ventured occasionally to address the Donna in Spanish, and sought

to draw her into conversation ; but she always shrunk from him with unmistakable dislike and hauteur, for the man's aspect was singularly repulsive. She could not fail to be pleased with the attentions of Lennard Blair ; he was decidedly a handsome fellow, engaging in manner, and modest and unassuming in bearing. She felt intuitively that the admiration which fettered him to her side, that made him hover near her, despite the chilling presence of old Saavedra, ever ready and prompt to proffer those little attentions a lady requires so incessantly on board of ship, was fast ripening into an emotion very tender indeed.

Lennard perhaps had no serious ultimate intentions, for he had no hope, and late events had shaken his faith severely. Donna Dora, he knew from Captain Maynard, was reputed to be enormously wealthy—in fact, one of the richest heiresses in Spanish America, and the old Hidalgo Dominga, whoever he was, would no doubt look at any stranger who addressed his daughter in the light of a presumptuous fortune-hunter. Loving her would be a pleasant delusion, which would end with the voyage. There might be a pang at the parting, an honest, heartfelt regret—and then he would set to work with a will in the elucidation of the Mexican affairs of Vere and Co., and the mysteries of their correspondence with the Captain Trocadero.

Strong head winds had latterly checked the speed of the *Golden Dream*, but about the morning of the twentieth day, as he sat at breakfast in the great saloon pleasantly chatting to Donna Dora and her Padrino, the cry of "land ahead" gave him the very pang he dreaded or anticipated, and his eyes met those of the Donna, as he gave her his hand, when with all the other passengers they hurried on deck. The steamer was now fairly in the tropics ; over the poop was spread a graceful awning of white canvas fringed with scarlet. Beneath this, the deck for coolness was well soused with salt water and carefully swabbed every morning, under the special eye of Mr. Kentledge, and now the sun was exhaling a steam from the deck, together with a strong odour of wood and pitch—an odour given in such warm latitudes alone. At the far horizon away to the south-west, amid the white haze that floated on the morning sea, the dark outline of the land, consisting of several ranges of mountains curving upward till they culminated in one great peak, appeared like a streak of floating cloud, for their bases were shrouded in thin mist, which gradually rose skyward and passed away altogether.

"That is Hispaniola, ladies," said Captain Maynard, as he

handed his telescope to the mature literary maiden with the blue spectacles.

"Hayti—or San Domingo?" said she, to show her erudition.

"It's all one which you call it, ma'am. Yonder low streak just above the starboard cat-head is the Island of Tortuga or tortoises; and the headland higher still is the mole of St. Nicholas. We shall haul up due south for the bay directly."

"And that mountain peak?" asked Dora.

"Cibao—it rises in the very centre of the island; and it is in the rocks of Cibao that the gold-mines lie."

Many vessels of various nations and of varied rig, polaccas and schooners, ships and steamers, and nearly all with their colours flying,—the red and yellow of Castile and Leon, the tricolour of France, the stars and stripes of Brother Jonathan, and the garish union of Britain with its absurd conglomeration of crosses, were now in sight, standing to or from the windward passage between Cuba and Hispaniola.

Under steam and canvas the vessel crept fast inshore; the mountain ridges attained greater altitude, their valleys afforded glimpses of the vast plain of La Vega Real, with all its fertility; then farms, sugar and coffee mills came in sight, and luxuriant plantations of cocoa and indigo; and ere long the city of Port-au-Prince, with its harbour full of shipping, the palace built by the black emperor, Faustus I., the Senate House, and the spires of the churches rising white against the background of verdant green, could be distinctly discerned, while much bustle ensued on board the *Golden Dream*. One officer was busy with a gang in getting the anchors over the bows, and the ground tackle rove; another in preparing the donkey engine for hoisting out the cargo, while a third made several clearances on deck prior to starting the hatches when the order was given to "break bulk." Amid all this, little M. Fabien, accoutred in a suit of black with the red ribbon at his buttonhole, was collecting his baggage and paying his adieux assiduously to all—the ladies in particular—for Hayti was to be the scene of his diplomatic labours—his exile from the joys of Paris.

Left almost to themselves amid the general bustle and pre-occupation of all, Lennard remained by the side of Donna Dora, and gazed upon her from time to time with growing interest. She was apparently wholly intent on observing the features of the coast through her lorgnette, and, like himself, was unaware that two persons were closely watching them. These were the Señor José and Captain Trocadero, both of whom had a great mistrust of Lennard, but from different motives. The former disliked

his systematic attentions to his ward; the latter dreaded that Lennard possessed a clue to some dangerous secret in his past life, and meant to use it against him. Lennard heeded neither them nor the picturesque shore; he was intently occupied by his fair companion.

"Her manner has betrayed what she—herself—begins to feel—that I am not indifferent to her," he said, mentally; "alas—I never thought to love again!—and this dear little Dora is in some things still a child—but a child with a spirit of her own. What if her Padrino should land with her here, to get rid of me perhaps? Then I should never see her more; yet the captain spoke of her home being near Tampico."

This sudden doubt or supposition caused him some agitation, and he half dreaded to question either her or Saavedra, lest the answer might be in the affirmative; and he sighed almost bitterly at the fear that he might have but a few hours more of her charming society, and that if not at Port-au-Prince, at the next island they might be separated finally. Was all this pleasant daily intercourse, were those rambles round the ship in the starlight, the music in the cabin at night, the bright smiling greetings on the poop in the sunny mornings, their interchange of thoughts, of jests and kindness, their glances so full of tender and merry meaning, and more than all, of thoughts unspoken, to go for nothing now, and to be but as a forgotten folly, perhaps on the morrow, when the *Golden Dream* might be ploughing through the Carribean Sea, and he would be standing on her deck alone—the subject perchance of many a jest by the vacant Jones and others who had envied him?

"You go on with the steamer to the Rio Tampico, I believe?" said he, after a long pause.

"Not quite so far," she replied, and then added with precipitation, "but you don't land here?"

"No."

"Nor at Kingston—I hope?"

This "hope" made Lennard's heart beat quicker, and he said,

"No, Donna Dora; I go to within two hundred and fifty miles of the Tampico River."

"Then you must be going to La Vera Cruz!" she exclaimed, with unconcealed pleasure dancing in her eyes.

"Yes—that is my destination."

"How strange—how delightful! I live in Vera Cruz, or not far from it."

"You, señora?"

"Yes—I shall live there with my papa, of course. But you, señor—what are you about to do in Vera Cruz?"

"Donna Dora," said he, smiling at the girlish abruptness of her question; "I go there to better my fortune. I have a hope, a desire, a project to return to my own country a rich man, or return no more. But desires like mine are seldom fulfilled, and such hopes are often blighted. We hear of the few who succeed in the race for riches; but never of the many who fail and perish by the wayside."

"Do not speak so sadly. Papa is very powerful in many ways; and as an Englishman himself—though quite a Spaniard in habits, tastes, and ideas—he may be well inclined to aid and serve you. And be assured that all—that—that is in my power——"

She paused and coloured deeply, drooping her eyelashes as if she was already saying, or perhaps thinking, too much, and admitting too great an interest in this casual fellow-voyager. She then gave a timid but smiling glance upward; and, as their eyes meet, there was a world of secret intelligence conveyed by that swift and fleeting glance.

"Donna Dora," said Lennard, perceiving that they were almost alone, and as he thought unnoticed, "if the emotions of a heart that—that," he continued, in a voice that became tremulous and soft. What he was about to say, it might be unsafe, perhaps, to speculate upon; but unfortunately he got no further, for at that moment Señor Saavedra came abruptly forward; and while begging a light for his cigar, by an inclination of his head and dark expressive eyes drew Lennard aft to the taffrail. There, stroking his huge mustachios and bustling himself out in his poncho, which he wore as a defence alike against heat and cold, he proceeded to ask Lennard a few questions, with intense gravity of manner, in the Spanish language, his English being hopelessly unintelligible; and it only came on him after dinner, or supper, when he added champagne to his sangaree and curaçoa punch.

"Señor, you will pardon my curiosity; but you go further with us than Hispaniola, I perceive?"

"Yes; I do not land here, at all events."

"Do you cross the Gulf?"

"Si, señor; I go to Vera Cruz."

"Diabolico! Do you say so?"

"Why, señor, what possible interest can you have in my movements? What can it matter to you where I go, or where I do not go?"

"Pardon me—a little further this way—I would crave the favour of a word or two apart."

"I am at your service, señor," said Lennard, bowing.

"Hark you, Señor Lennard—for such I believe is your name—you are, I think, nay, I am sure," he continued, bowing low, but haughtily, "a gentleman (gentil-hombre), a caballero?"

"I hope so. I have never done aught to forfeit the name," replied Lennard, who began to think that a duel with revolvers or bowie-knives was in prospect.

"Then permit me to ask, if it is right in you, as a mere pastime—for it can be nothing else—to compromise a young lady of good position, by assiduous and intrusive attentions?"

"What, and whom do you mean?" asked Lennard, haughtily.

"Who could I mean," continued the little man, whose black eyes shot fire; "but my alsijada (godchild), the Donna Dora?"

"Stay, sir, I have no wish to offend or to quarrel with one so much my superior in years, and perhaps in position. I have done nothing beyond the bounds of simple politeness, and if honoured by her friendship——"

"Bagatela! do you take me for a fool—a very ass, señor? By friendship for a girl like her, you mean—love!"

"Well, and what then, señor?" asked Lennard, who disliked intensely the loud tone and towering bearing of the little Spaniard.

"I ask you, señor, is it just, honest, or honourable in you, of whom we and she know nothing, to take advantage of the many chances afforded by a sea-voyage——"

"Chances—advantage?" interrupted Lennard, angrily.

"Yes, is it honourable, I repeat, in you to compromise her, as you seem determined to do? Excuse my making these remarks; but your English freedom of manner suits neither New or Old Spain, and I have the honour to be a native of the latter."

"And consequently possess some very narrow prejudices, perhaps?" said Lennard, greatly provoked at being thus lectured and taken to task.

"What you term prejudice, I, señor, deem prudence. Her father, who is my best and oldest friend, intrusted the care of her homeward journey to me. He will demand a strict account of my stewardship—thus I stand here to-day in his place."

Lennard bowed. The Spaniard had resumed his politeness of tone, and thus disarmed the young man, who felt that the questioner had right on his side; but not knowing what to say, Lennard could only give a sigh of impatience.

"Pardon me one question," said Saavedra; "are you a mercantile man?"

"Yes, señor."

"I hope you are a wealthy one?"

"Far from it; and I may be very poor ere long. I know not what is before me," added Lennard, as he thought of Sir Cullender Crowdy, his doubts of Mr. Vere and his desire to leave their interests altogether.

"Your admission is honest, and I like you the better for it," said Señor Saavedra, patting Lennard on the shoulder. "Donna Dora's family are immensely rich—none are more so in all Mexico perhaps; so in seeking to protect her, I am, perhaps, but saving you from yourself. Beware of this trifling—this pursuit of a bubble, for in the land to which we are going, the land of fire and fever, of bullion-mines, of earthquakes, and tidal waves—a land where the bullet and dagger take the place of sober laws—a land totally unlike the Europe we have left, we have means—very unpleasant *means*, by which at times we rid ourselves of those who mar our plans or cross our paths."

And with these ominous words, which contained a most unmistakable threat, Saavedra turned away, and as a still more unpleasant sequel to such a conversation, joined Captain Trocadero.

CHAPTER LVII.

OFF THE BAYE DE BARADERES.

THE very palpable threat of that little spitfire, Señor José Saavedra, inspired Lennard with just anger rather than alarm. But after a conversation so marked in its character and so unpleasant in its context, he did not feel himself quite at liberty to improve his already delightful acquaintance with Donna Dora, and still less to urge any useless suit, though there is nothing so suggestive of the tender passion as propinquity, and daily almost constant association with a pretty girl. Studiously he saw as little of her as possible during the three days which the *Golden Dream* lay at Port-au-Prince, coaling, taking in goods and passengers, chiefly coloured folks in the steerage for Kingston; but still some of the warnings uttered by Saavedra rankled bitterly in his mind.

"Riches, wealth—these words again—here, even here!" thought he; and in his hatred of the terms, he felt for a time a radical—a republican, and almost as one of those who

view in every man who possesses fairer prospects or a larger purse—an enemy! And he loathed those worshippers of the golden calf he was himself in search of—the vulgar and overweening aristocracy of wealth.

Then there was the threat of what *might* be done against him in a land so lawless; and with the threat he remembered the immediate and ominous turning of the Señor to Trebucio Trocadero, a man of whose secret character he had the worst suspicions! And he was totally destitute of arms, without even the inevitable revolver and bowie-knife with which all wanderers provide themselves for vague contingencies in those regions of revolution and disorder—of rows and recklessness of human life—lands where the worst and most fiery passions of Europe are heated to excess by a tropical climate and by association and intermarriage with the savage. A revolver pistol bearing his name had once been in his possession, but that now had gone, with all his other baggage, to assist in outfitting Mr. Travice Cheatwood for the tropics.

The fifth morning after the peculiar conversation saw the *Golden Dream* running through the channel of La Gonave, with a light breeze aft, full steam up, and a bright sunshine gilding all the rippling sea around her. Donna Dora was on deck under the poop awning with a fan and parasol, and looked with something of pique and surprise at Lennard, who after a simple and studiously modest salutation, had gone forward to smoke with the Yankee supercargo and others, leaving her entirely to the flattering attentions of Ensign Jones and one or two others, young doctors and planters, who were resolving to make the most of the thirty-six hours' run or so, which would bring them to their destination. The water was intensely blue; the waves rose and fell in golden light, with tiny specks of foam upon their tops; the ship's wake astern could be traced for miles like a path upon the water. The sun streamed brightly upon the long stretch of deck, and all the ship was instinct with life, for again the cocks and hens were clucking in the replenished coops, where the steward was searching for new-laid eggs, and several investments made by the ladies, in the shape of tiny paroquets, were swung in cages from the lower rigging.

Greatly to the disgust of those gentlemen who hovered near her, Donna Dora seemed disposed to absorb in conversation the boatswain, Mr. Kit Kentledge, who on this morning was occupied in preparing a new dog-vane, made of feathers and bunting, for the use of the officer of the watch by night; and she persisted in asking him questions concerning

the coast and its features, and his replies always savoured sufficiently of salt water.

"And that opening in the land, dear Mr. Kentledge, just now; do you see it?" she inquired.

"You means the bight, just by the weather-brace of the foresail, mam?"

"Yes; just over there," said she, pointing with her parasol in the direction indicated.

"That is the Baye de Baraderes, that is, mam, in the eastmost pint of Hispaniola; and just where the sea is abreaking over that rock, and where the blue sharks are always found thickest, there's lying in twenty fathom water a privateer brig, as was ballasted with silver dollars and gold doubloons took from the Jack Spaniards in the old war; but she capsized and went down with all hands aboard 'cept the captain's bulldog. He had a caul, if you knows what that is, mam, as a charm aboard agin danger, and also three horse-shoes nailed on his stern; but they warn't no use, for he had his warning o' what was to come."

"A warning; in what way?"

"When a thousand knots off the land, a full-grown rook, as black as the cook's face or a parson's coat, lighted on the jib-boom end! Now if that warn't a sign of something ugly about to happen to that ere craft I'm a Dutchman!"

"And what happened?"

"The rook sat there in defiance of all the shots the crew fired at it, croaking and flapping his wings till a fear came over them, and for days and nights the brig went through the water like a hot knife through butter, till she was off yonder rock, when, as I said, she capsized in a squall, and went down trucks foremost. Nothing has ever been seen of her since, 'cepting some of the yellow doubloons which are washed up in the Baye of Baraderes, and they are always as black as the barnacles on the ship's bottom, saving your presence, mam."

"That will do, Kentledge," said Captain Maynard, laughing; "ship your dog-vane, and get some of those new sails bent on forward while the weather is fine, for I have fears it may not be long so."

The boatswain touched his hat and went forward. Mr. Kentledge did not affect the dandyism of the mates. In lieu of their semi-uniform with brass buttons, he exhibited a great amount of check-shirt; a pair of trousers tight at the waist and loose about the ankles; a well-varnished hat in wet weather; a straw one in fine, with a long blue ribbon floating from it, and always perched on the back of his head.

Round his brawny throat was a black silk neckerchief, knotted in a style on which he rather prided himself. He had a handsome but sunburnt and weatherbeaten face; a pair of merry blue eyes and set of strong white teeth. He had a rolling gait, a wide step, large brown hands, ever ready apparently to grasp and tally on to something. He seemed about five-and-forty years old, and displayed a wealth of that rich curly hair and whisker peculiar to most of those who "go down to the sea in ships and do business in great waters." Trocadero also looked every inch a seaman; but of the bulldog and ruffianly type—the pirate, the slaver, and the Coolie crimp.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PAMPERO.

Islet à Pierre Joseph, the most western point of beautiful Hispaniola, was sinking like a purple cloudlet into the blue water far astern, when certain rapid atmospheric changes began to arrest the attention and excite the anxiety of Captain Maynard, who seemed to have many consultations with his senior mates, and with Captain Trocadero, who knew those latitudes well. The sky, usually one of the deepest blue, had given place to one enveloped in murky masses of swiftly-sailing cloud; there was a gloom aloft and in the now turbid sea, with a close and sultry state of the air that seemed to presage thunder; and ere long red lightning was seen repeatedly to flash upward from behind a dense and dusky bank of vapour that rested on the ocean away to the north-west, where the waves broke in white and frothy outline against it.

Kit Kentledge with a seaman's instincts was always looking out to windward, and the dark, stern eyes of Trocadero turned frequently in the same direction; both shook their heads from time to time, and watched the shifting vane on the mizen truck, where it caught currents of air as yet unfelt below; and as the day wore on the gusts or blasts of hot wind veered more and more ahead, increasing so much in strength, that after taking in all the light sails, Captain Maynard ordered the watch on deck to "take everything else off her, to the reefed topsails and forecourse." He was frequently in the engine-room in consultation with the engineer; often he inspected the glasses which were falling rapidly and steadily, and he seemed prepared to pass the night on the poop or the bridge between the paddle-boxes.

Lennard noted all these anxieties perhaps more than the other passengers, because he had, unwillingly, been made the interpreter of some of the questions asked by Captain Maynard and the senior mate of Trebucio Trocadero. This sullen and taciturn individual seemed also to prefer facing the common blast on deck to waiting for it in the cabin; and when the night closed thoroughly in, the rolling and lurching of the ship was so great, that all the ladies retired to their own cabin earlier than usual; whereupon, having no one to mount guard over, Señor José, after a mild jorum of sangaree dashed with brandy, tucked himself into his cot; and after having a rubber or two at whist, Mr. Jones, his two brother officers, and the planters, retired also.

Mr. Nutmeg, the Yankee supercargo, had long since dozed off to sleep, with his head on a sofa, his heels on a table, a quid of tobacco betwcen his teeth, and another stuck on the point of his knife ready for use.

Lennard was now the only other occupant of the long and elegant saloon cabin, where he lay on one of the sofas or cushioned lockers, endeavouring to reflect if possible amid the incessant and increasing noises on deck, and wondering whether Donna Dora was also awake and similarly occupied within yonder double door which closed the ladies' sanctum for the night.

"Ain't you going to turn in, sir?" asked the steward, who was making his way from lamp to lamp by a succession of zig-zag lurches, and extinguishing all save one, while his mates were shipping the dead lights, with ring and batten in the after-cabin or ladies' boudoir.

"No, I mean to sleep here," replied Lennard; "I fear we are about to have a rough night, and should like to see it out."

"Fear we shall, sir; it'll blow great guns afore morning, and there are pleasantcr places to face than just where we are now, with the reefs of Navasa showing their black teeth through the white breakers to leeward; but more canvas has been set on thc ship, and all braced up to give 'em the go-by."

"Navasa; what place is it?"

"An uninhabited island, sir. Last voyage but one we took off from it two shipwrecked men, who had been there a'most three weeks; just two hours before we hove in sight they had made up their minds to die, for they were a-starving, and on their knees they both swore a very strange oath."

"What was its tenor?"

"That whoever died first should *not* be eatcn by the sur-

vivor. It was blowing precious hard at the time, but Mr. Kentledge and six volunteers went off for them in the long-boat, else their bones had been there still, poor fellows."

"And where is this island?"

"Leeward, and I hope well-abeam by this time, sir."

"I mean where situated?"

"Midway a'most between Hispaniola and Jamaica."

"Midway—well, thank Heaven we are so far!"

'True, sir; but that is a wide word in these here seas, and in such a night as this is likely to be," replied the steward, a curly-headed and florid little Englishman, who had been substituting a rough storm garment for his natty blue jacket with its brass buttons, and was tying a sou'-wester under his chin. Even he, though half-waiter and half-seaman, was preparing for the contingencies of the night.

Lennard was in a sullen and thoughtful mood, and at that moment felt somewhat defiant alike of fortune and the elemental war. Stretched on the soft cushions, with the fag-end of a cigar in his mouth and his hands clasped under his head, he lay listening to the piping gusts that ever and anon shook the ship to her centre, the hiss of the heavy spray, and the booming sound on deck, as a sea occasionally pooped her; the orders given hoarsely through the trumpet, half heard and half lost in the bellowing wind that swept them off to leeward; the rattle of the great rudder in its case, as four men now at the wheel, with bare feet planted on the deck-grating, had hard work to keep the vessel, though under steam and close-reefed canvas, to her course.

In the storm, for it almost amounted to one, there was something strangely congenial to Lennard's mood of mind. Donna Dora, piqued by his recent inattention, had barely smiled to him an adieu, when she and the ladies retired; and the memory of the threatening conversation with her padrino still rankled angrily in his mind. The months he had spent at home, at Oakwoodlee and Blairavon, had proved a term of exciting events; his previous life at Liverpool had been one of routine and monotony, varied only by the hopes and fears of a futile passion, now to be no more remembered. All these were exchanged for a long and varied sea voyage, under tropical skies, in a magnificent steam ship; and the present, he felt, should be a period of pleasure, and must have been one perhaps without alloy, but for the monetary doubts and anxieties already referred to; the strange mystery of Mr. Vere being in secret correspondence with Captain Trocadero, and his proposal to take Sir Cullender as a partner. From this point he strove to turn his thoughts away;

he let his cigar-end drop on the floor, and, rocked by the swaying of the vessel, was about to fall dreamily asleep with thoughts of Donna Dora's violet eyes and golden hair, when lo!—There was a shock—a thundering, booming crash, as if the vessel had been torn asunder; a terrible vibrating or tremulous sensation thrilled through the vast length from stem to stern, and Lennard was flung with violence from the portside away over to starboard, amid a wilderness of chairs, campstools, cushions, books, backgammon-boards, and other *débris* from the various tables. Partly stunned and bewildered, he lay for nearly a minute where he fell, while pale and startled faces were instantly thrust forth from state-room doors and curtained berths.

"Hollo—what's the doocid row?" elegantly drawled Ensign Jones, timorously peeping forth with parted hair, and eyes very wide open indeed.

"Jerusalem and apple sarce, Captain; but we'll find that out too soon—there's a darned smash o' something on deck, I reckon," said Mr. Nutmeg, plunging his arms into a pea-jacket.

Exclamations and inquiries made in varying tones, and to which no one could reply, were now heard on all sides, with wild and excited screams from the ladies' cabin, and cries of —"Stewardess—stewardess—dress me immediately! the ship is sinking—sinking—sinking—oh!"

"Ave Maria Purissima!" moaned José Saavedra, muffling himself up in his berth and preparing to go comfortably to the bottom with all his blankets about him; "O—o—o, Jesu Maria y José, el Padre de Nuestro Señor!"

"Get up, you darned crittur, and make yourself useful!" growled the American; "airthquakes and ginger nuts, skipper, what *is* the matter?" he asked of the steward, who came into the saloon drenched with spray, and with a bleeding hand.

"Bad business on deck, gentlemen, the main-top sail blown out of the men's hands; the foresail split nigh to ribbons, and the ship, with all her breadth of beam just on the point of capsizing, when the topmasts and jibboom snapped right off at the caps like barley-sugar, carrying three men away with them to leeward; and that ain't the worst," continued the steward, as he knotted a handkerchief round his bruised and bleeding fingers, chiefly with the aid of his teeth; "the starboard wheel is useless, the shaft snapped when she heeled over, burying it in water, for we are caught in a regular *Pampero!*"

Long ere this had been narrated, Lennard had made his

way to the poop-rail, where he clung for some minutes in utter confusion and dismay before his eye and mind, amid the darkness and chaos of the scene, could fairly understand the nature and danger of their disaster.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE roaring of the wind, mingled with the blowing off of the steam, made a terrific medley when combined with the flapping of the split forecourse and loose mainsail, the excited voices of the crew, the lashing of ropes that cracked like giant whips on the blast, the groaning of the ship, the deep hoarse boom of every sea that struck her in succession as she pitched like a helpless log. But on falling away before the wind, she rose and fell in heavy plunges on each successive surge that rolled towards her, with sulky crest and heaving ridge dark and curling, till it burst in foam and fury on the decks, sweeping loose spars, buckets, and so forth, to leeward. Around, all was pitchy blackness, and the sea was dark as if its waves were ink, whitened only by foam and spray.

In no way daunted by the critical situation of the ship, Captain Maynard and his mates were already getting her fast into a working state. The starboard shaft—the snapping of which had caused all the mischief—was in reality outside the ship, and as the wheels were of great value, to save one and get the other in motion were their chief objects. In such a sea, with the ship disabled aloft, some might have thought these ends impossible of attainment, and would have cut the disabled wheel adrift; but not so the gallant Maynard. Every man on board was now on deck, and at once two gangs were formed; one, under the chief mate's orders, proceeded to get the loose wreck cut away; the mainsail and rags of the forecourse handed and furled; another, under Maynard and the engineer, was busy upon the starboard wheel, getting off the buckets and hoisting them on deck. Perilous and slippery work was this, in a wild black night—amid a tearing pampero, with the spray and foam flying over them every moment; but here worked Lennard side by side with Trocadero, and in the excitement of the time he forgot alike the ominous remark of that personage and the threat of Saavedra, for now life and safcty depended on the exertions of all on board. Seeing that the men aloft were sorely impeded by the fury of the wind, "Quick, my

lads, with that mainsail, and stow the bunt!" shouted Maynard through his trumpet from the bridge; "have we the crew of a collier up there? Stow away, and then every man must bear a hand upon the starboard wheel!"

Every hand, ere long, was busy upon it; the wheel was lashed to the timbers of the engine-house by ponderous chains and powerful hawsers, while the carpenters were hard at work placing chaffing boards between it and the ship's side; and after some hours of incessant toil, the crew gave a faint cheer, when, with one wheel revolving, a staysail and reefed mainsail set, the *Golden Dream* began slowly to move through the water. By this time the gale had expended its fury, and a faint light indicated the approach of day.

"Now we shall be able to creep along," said Captain Maynard to Trocadero, "at the rate of some six knots or so, with a weather-helm, if we can't keep our rudder amidships."

The Spaniard gave a growl of satisfaction, and the Captain added:—

"Mr. Kentledge, give an order to the steward to issue a tot of grog per man forward—all have done their duty nobly."

"Thank you, sir," replied the boatswain, as he wrung the water from his jacket prior to seeking the steward's storeroom; "a caulker does make the gear of human life run smoother in the blocks, and we've had a rough night. Some go to sea for fun and to the devil for pleasure; but I should prefer to look elsewhere for either."

"Waal—they've pluck after all, these Britishers, and don't use their hands only for tearing their hair, like that Spanish crittur in his crib below," said Mr. Jalcel Nutmeg, as he took an approving survey of the crippled ship, prior to once more seeking his rest in the saloon.

The excitement past, the ship going slowly and laboriously through the sea, which was still rolling in enormous waves, but more gently as the wind had gone down, Lennard was reclining wearily for a few minutes against the break of the poop-deck which there projected a few feet, and formed a kind of shelter in wet weather. The time and place were both gloomy, for the blackness of night yet rested on the sea, though a stripe of distant light showed where day would dawn. Lennard eyed it wistfully, and was just about to solace himself with a cigar, prior to seeking a little repose, when his hand was timidly touched by another, whose soft texture and taper fingers taught him by a thrill to whom it belonged.

"You here, Donna Dora—in the chill air of the early morning!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"But I am so warmly wrapped up—see how thick my shawl is," said she, cheerfully.

"Where is Señor Saavedra?"

"Where he has been during all this terrible hubbub—quaking in bed and praying to our Lady of Guadaloupe. Anyway I have not seen him; but you at least will not leave me—will take care of me," said she in a low tone that stirred the inner chords of his heart; and drawing her arm within his, he pressed it closely.

"You scarcely spoke to me all yesterday—did I offend you?" she resumed.

"Offend me—oh no."

"Then why was this?"

"Another time I shall tell you all."

"Why not now?"

"The explanation would have its perils."

"Is it true that some of our poor sailors have been drowned?"

"Three unfortunate fellows—yes."

"Three! Ave Maria! God bless them—bless and receive them!" said she very devoutly, and shuddering as she looked at the desolate aspect of the ship aloft, and the black sea that was rolling away to leeward; "but is all our danger past?"

"Not quite."

"Ah, tell me how?"

"I understand there is such a strain upon the port wheel, that the shaft may snap again with another dreadful crash."

"Oh, merciful heaven," she exclaimed, not quite understanding what he meant, but inferring something terrible; "if we should perish—die to-night!"

"I care not—if I die thus—with you by my side," said Lennard with a flush of sublime joy, as he bent his face close to hers and could see a tender light in her eyes—a light which the long and tremulous lashes failed to hide.

"You love me, then?" said she, after a little pause filled up by the pulsations of her heart.

"I do—passionately—dearly—hopelessly, Dora!" said he, bewildered by a speech and deduction so unexpected.

"Then why should you not care to die—would you not rather live?" she asked in the same artless manner; and in the same breathless whisper he replied:

"To live would be to waken from my dream."

Then his arm stole round her, and the graceful head, yet muffled in the shawl, dropped for a moment on his shoulder—close to his heart, which was beating wildly. So the

secret of each was out—that they loved each other. She was silent now, and his conversation was made up of disjointed sentences, expressions of tenderness—of love—all said in tones that were soft and low and thrilling; and moments there were of perfect silence, more eloquent perhaps than anything tongue could utter. And this love scene ensued in no green lane or leafy woodland, in no arbour of roses and honeysuckles, or blooming garden, with amber evening stealing through the trees; but on the deck of a half-dismasted ship, crippled, drenched, and wave-worn, toiling through the stormy Carribean sea, which the fury of the pampero had flaked with snowy foam, and while a cold grey dawn was spreading with tropical rapidity over the cheerless waste.

"By Jove, Brown, if that Scotsman isn't actually spoony upon the little Spaniard, even in the middle of all this disgusting row!" said Ensign Jones, of the 5th West India, shivering as the spray hissed over him, when he came from inspecting with vacant wonder the broken wheel, and clinging with the tenacity of a cat to successive belaying-pins, and getting his feet entangled in the bight of many a loose rope, ere he made a sliding rush to reach the door of the saloon.

Dora was at that very age when courtship becomes the most exquisite time of a young girl's existence. She was in the first flush of a first passion. With Lennard Blair it was not so, and yet he loved her dearly, deeply, and devotedly, clinging to this new passion all the more that he had loved and lost—loved and been disappointed, having his generous and ardent heart thrust back upon himself. He had not told her that he had never loved before, for that would have been untrue; but he told her that he adored her with all the strength of which his nature—one impulsive as her own—was capable. "The first symptom of true love in a young man is timidity; in a girl it is confidence," says Victor Hugo. "This will surprise, and yet nothing is more simple; the sexes have a tendency to approach, and each assumes the qualities of the other;" and hence it was that the fearless question of Donna Dora, so artlessly put, drew forth the avowal that loaded Lennard's tongue.

The chilly state of the atmosphere now led him, however delightful the situation, to urge that she should retire, and with her soft, deep, liquid eyes, she looked lovingly in his face, as she clung with both hands to his arm for a moment, and with a strong intonation of her glorious Spanish mingling with her English, said,—"Adios, Lennard—adios, mi

querida—I shall go to sleep if I can, after a night of terror ——"

"And a dawn of joy, beloved Dora."

"Yes, of joy!" and kissing her hand, she glided away with a beautiful smile, leaving Lennard Blair a little bewildered by the suddenness with which the new position had come about, and with a heart full of happiness, but a happiness that was not without alloy,—

They loved each other and had avowed it,
But how about the future?

CHAPTER LX.

THE RING.

"Aw--aw—rough night the last, by Jove!" drawled the vapid Mr. Jones, using his customary phrase.

"Raythor, Colonel; have a gin cocktail on the head of it?" responded Mr. Nutmeg.

"Thanks; I prefer having brandy-and-soda in a long glass, with ice in it, if the steward has such a thing. This isn't a late breakfast, but rather a smart little early luncheon, garnished with gruyere and caviare; but we sorely want the kimmel nips, the plovers' eggs, and pickled oysters to make the thing complete."

"Queer fixings for breakfast, I reckon, Colonel," replied the Yankee to the officer, who Lennard, while dressing hastily, knew were seated at table, with some of the other passengers, engaged in partaking of a hasty but late breakfast, such as the steward and his weary assistants could provide after the confusion of the previous night, and the fall of the spars from aloft having damaged the cook's galley.

Roused from happy dreams, Lennard had sprung from bed and proceeded to finish his toilet with all speed, half fearing that some of the events of last night might also prove a dream.

"And so this haar Jamaikey is your lo-cation, Colonel?" continued the Yankee, with his nazal drawl, while cramming his long leathern jaws with many condiments at once.

"Yes, Mr. Nutmeg; but, as yet, I have the honour only to be ensign," replied Jones, drily.

"A small bit of honour that, I take it. Now, in the United States, we seldom have anything under the rank of colonel. I once knew a Lieutenant Colonel, but *he* kept a coal store in a small way too, at Buffalo. Waal, and so your

Queen locates ye haar? That ain't much to be grateful for; it's an almighty place for rep-tiles? Mosquitoes will bite you all day; wet lizards crawl over you in your first sleep at night; torpedoes lie under your pillow, and the land crabs will look out for you, after being reduced to bare bones by the yellow fever. Sorry for you, I reckon, Ensign Jones."

"Hope you won't find Jamaica so bad a place, after all, sir. Mr. Nutmeg speaks of the past," said the cheerful voice of Captain Maynard. "Pass the word for'ard for more toast, steward. That is Saltpond-hill abeam of us now, for we are in the pilot's hands, and he is taking us between the Sandy Keys, straight for the harbour. Yonder is the train just starting for Spanish Town. We shall be abreast of Fort Charles directly."

And so the vessel proved to be, when Lennard came forth, after a more than usually careful toilette (how particular he was on this morning about his hair, tie, cuffs, and studs, &c.), to find the saloon already littered by the baggage of the passengers, all of whom were for Kingston, except Señor Saavedra, Donna Dora, Captain Trocadero, and himself. The crippled aspect of the dismasted steamer attracted some attention from the shore, as she crept slowly into that magnificent basin, which is overlooked by the mountain-range of the Liguanea, and sheltered on the seaward by the long neck of the Palisades, within which the fleets of all the world might anchor with ease and safety. Seated together at luncheon, or breakfast (for the meal partook of the nature of both), while the *Golden Dream*, now aided by a sturdy tug-steamer, came slowly abreast of Fort Augustus and Mosquito Point, Lennard and Donna Dora were conversing on ordinary topics, and pointing out to each other's notice the opening charms of that beautiful Haven, as they appeared in succession, like a panorama, through the now open windows of the saloon, which admitted the soft, warm breeze from the land, the luxurious grass-fields on the west, and the wooded hills of Healthshire on the south; but while seated thus, we say, no one, even those who, like the ever-watchful padrino, remarked an unusual flush in Dora's damask cheek, or a brightness in her veiled eyes, would have suspected the secret, so mighty and so tender, which the break of the poop-deck had overheard but a few stormy hours before.

The old Señor José's nervous system had received a severe shock by the catastrophe over-night; and having a constitutional horror of all bustle, on finding the ship given over to noisy gangs of carpenters, white, yellow, and black, who proceeded to sway up and rig aloft spare spars and masts,

while other gangs of Coolies and Negro porters were at work upon the cargo hoisting out and lowering in, and the hammers of a third party were at work upon the damaged wheel: then, added to all of this, were the merry farewells of the officers, who were bound for Up-Park Barracks, of the planters for the Cabaritta River, and many a pen in the Liganea hills; of the fair Diarist, with the false-front, blue goggles, and scalplock, as Mr. Jaleel Nutmeg ungallantly termed her "back hair;" in short, the general hubbub proved too much for the sombre little hidalgo, who, after a vain attempt to face it out sulkily on the poop, in his poncho and sombrero, retired to his berth once more, and left his golden-haired alsijada to the care of the only person he dreaded now—Lennard Blair; and amid the intense preoccupation of all around them, though the great ship lay nearly four days in Kingston Harbour, the young couple found themselves isolated and alone. Yet not so much alone as they supposed; for Captain Trocadero, who never left the ship, had been taken into the confidence and secret service of Saavedra, who having early discovered that the sulky mariner had a private grudge at Lennard, requested him to keep an eye upon his ward. This the truculent Spaniard readily promised to do, and thus saw much of an intimacy which he was, as yet, without the means or direct authority for stopping; but which nevertheless led him to form some very daring plans on his own account, and of these we shall hear more elsewhere.

So they promenaded on the poop under the broad awning without interruption; played many a dreamy game of chess; again and again she sang to him the little romance of Pedro de Padilla (which he had heard on the first night they met on board), and many more beside; but how could Trocadero stop this? And their evenings on the deck, when the glorious moon lighted up the harbour like a mirror, and seemed to fill its waters with phosphorescent fires, that shot in strange forms to and fro, mingling with the tremulous rays of the lamps reflected from Kingston and Port Royal—tranquil and starry evenings that were full of happiness and hopeful promises to be read in each other's eyes!

How was Trocadero to stop these either? He could but steal stealthy glances at a pleasure in which he had no share; thrust his huge hands into the yellow Spanish sash which he now wore, and mutter, "Carajo—Satanos!" The first day of mutually expressed love past, the poetry of their existence became seasoned by a little prose, and Lennard began to speak of her family, of the step they previously had taken,

and of her father's concurrence ; that of his own friends none were living now. He told her too of his position in life, and that he was going to Mexico as the administrador, agent, and partner of a Liverpool mercantile house.

"Bueno !" said she, gaily ; "I told you that my dear papa is a merchant too. How fortunate !"

"We are happy—very happy now, Dora ; but a day will come—is coming too surely and too fast—when our *Golden Dream* will be in port again."

"I hope so—well ?"

"You do not see my meaning," said he, with a sigh ; "what then shall you do, and what shall I ?"

"Do ; I must rush ashore and embrace papa—if he is not, as I am sure he will be, on board to anticipate me."

"And then you must learn to forget that you ever met such a person as Lennard Blair ? our dear dream of love will then be over, Dora !"

"Do not speak thus. It is impossible. I am sure that papa will love you quite as much as—as I do—he must, he *shall* do so !" she added, vehemently, her eyes flashing through their tears.

Lennard smiled sadly and shook his head incredulously while toying with her little hands on a finger of which he slipped a ring and begged her acceptance of it for his sake. It was an antique signet, which had belonged to his father, and was indeed a world too large even for Dora's thumb ; but she had another ring as a guard to protect it.

"It is a bloodstone, so I must treasure it very much. It is something almost sacred !"

"How so ?"

"I can remember my aunt, who is a nun of our Lady of Guadaloupe, telling me the story of its origin. When the holy blood from that wicked spear which pierced our Saviour's side fell from the cross, it dropped on some green jaspers at the foot thereof, so the stone has been spotted with red ever since."

Lennard did not tell her that Scotland's volcanic rocks were full of just such jaspers ; but he kissed her hand in token that she had accepted the last and only gift of which Travice Cheatwood had failed to despoil him.

"If I have had but a delightful dream, I must strive to content me with its memory," he would sigh in his heart.

"Do you know, Lennard, that I felt a strange liking for you on that night when I first recognized you again in the cabin,—an emotion which—which—made me long to have you as a friend. What could it be ?"

"I cannot say—I do not flatter myself that—that it was——"

"That it was what?"

"Love at first sight."

"Pho! you might have felt that for me; not I for *you*."

"What emotion was it then, Dora?"

"I cannot tell, mi querida—but something seemed to speak in my heart."

"Such a little fairy it is!" exclaimed Lennard, as he caressed her soft bright hair.

"What right," he would often ask himself, "have I to offer her a heart already seared and callous with disappointment?" But male hearts can stand a deal of searing and cauterizing at five-and-twenty, though Lennard had not yet learned to think so.

Dora, even in the flush of her love for him, was not without secret fears of just opposition to their passion at home; there was the proverbial flintiness of a father's heart, and a Spanish father's in particular; there were the antagonism of race, of religion, and, it might be, too surely, of means and position, and perhaps a pre-arranged alliance. Then her loving heart would grow troubled, her soft voice tremulous, her eyes would fill and their lids become heavy; her little hands would play nervously with that huge signet ring, which, though she could not foresee it, was yet to play another important part in her history, and she would for periods be sunk in thought.

At these times, as he sat watching her, Lennard, had he dared, would have clasped her to his breast; but there was a strange pride in Dora, with all her *abandon*, and the very purity and confidence of the girl's manner repelled the passionate impulse. Could he have looked into Donna Dora's heart, he might have discovered that his chances of offending were not deeply seated, for there was more of love for him growing up and maturing there than the girl knew—nor would know till an hour of separation came—untutored as she was in the ways of the world, and in the secret springs of thought. In the tenour of his intercourse with Dora, there were none of the poutings, the occasional fits of vague coldness, the angry and jealous outbursts, the chilling and concealed suspicions that characterized the term of his affair with Hesbia Vere, the calculating flirt, whose object in life had really but one end and aim,—to retain all the luxuries of life, and secure a good position by marriage.

With Donna Dora it was a clinging affection—the full spring tide of a first love, for her whole heart had gone forth

to Lennard Blair, "the kind, thoughtful, and soft-eyed young man, who had saved them from some dreadful affronts in England—who had come with them over the sea, and with whom she had so many topics and interests in common," as she afterwards wrote to her horrified aunt, at the convent of our Lady of Guadaloupe.

Lennard longed with a species of vague terror—if such a word can be used—for the issue of all this.

"To what end do I love again?" he would think, in his times of self-examination; "and if the warnings of Saavedra be true, why love her, of all women, embittering, destroying perhaps my career in South America, before I have placed a foot upon its soil? Riches on one hand (mammon—always mammon!), doubt and, it may be, poverty on the other? A foreign lineage—strange sympathies—every obstacle that one can think of, for her father, this señor, or Don Dominga, or whatever he is called, though English by birth, may prove a vast deal too Spanish for my taste, or quite to relish me."

Such were Lennard's misgivings, which became more confirmed when the *Golden Dream*, after being under repair day and night, had once more put to sea, and after he had seen the long wavy chain of the Blue Mountains, with their vales and savannahs between, their fields of bright green cane and clusters of snow-white houses, fade amid amber and gold far away astern, and turn from red to violet in the fiery setting sun, and from thence to a cold neutral tint, when midnight saw the ship upon the star-lit waves that wash the lonely Caymans.

CHAPTER LXI.

TROCADERO MEETS A SHIPMATE.

MISFORTUNE was still in store for that good ship the *Golden Dream*. A serious leak, caused probably by the concussion she had undergone in the pampero, had been discovered, beyond the reach of her carpenters, and some of her lower compartments were full of water. The cargo was a valuable one; so some days after their departure from Kingston saw her standing with full steam on and every foot of canvas stretched to the yard-heads, not across the Gulf of Mexico, but—after traversing the channel of Yucatan and rounding the Point of Pedro—making direct for the town and bay of Campeaché, where, as Captain Maynard knew, there was a good dock in which he could have his

great vessel completely overhauled, ere her lading were destroyed ; and this necessity was the more provoking, that they were now only one hundred and seventy miles distant from Tampico, and of course, less from La Vera Cruz ; but the reports of the carpenters were so urgent and alarming, that Maynard was glad when he found himself at anchor in the shallow bay, and surrounded by tugs, lighters, and other craft, for getting out the cargo and lightening the ship.

To two other persons on board, Dora and Lennard Blair, this unexpected delay was alone a source of satisfaction, as it would enable them to be a few days longer in each other's society undisturbed by the fear of separation ; but this hope was speedily dissipated, for on the morning after their arrival in the bay, and just when Lennard was pencilling in Dora's album a sketch of the old town of San Francisco de Campeaché, with its walls of stone, the fort with the Republican flag flying, the groves of cocoa-trees, and the huts of the Indian saltmakers roofed with palmetto leaves, and far beyond the distant Siena that overlooks New Merida and Valladolid—Señor Saavedra came to announce to her that Captain Trocadero had discovered a ship about to sail for Vera Cruz—a swift vessel, commanded by an old shipmate of his, in which Captain Maynard would, he had no doubt, secure a passage for them both—if not he would do so himself.

"And I shall secure one for you too, if you wish it, Mr. Blair," added the captain, who overheard the señor's hasty and exulting announcement, and saw how painfully Lennard changed colour ; "I should be loth to part friends," he added with a wink, while Saavedra struck his heel on the deck with ill-concealed passion. "The ship won't be habitable while she is being careened, and the posadas ashore are not the most comfortable hotels in the world. My boatswain Kit Kentledge—though I can ill spare him—shall go with you at the same time, as I have to forward some of the ship's papers by a sure hand to Tampico, so he shall sail as far as Vera Cruz, which lies on his way."

"The captain, Manuel Moreno, who commands the cutter *Gaviota*, declines to take any other passengers on board than the Señor Saavedra, the young lady who is his ward, and myself," said Captain Trocadero, gruffly.

"Indeed ?" said Captain Maynard, surveying that personage coolly.

"Positivimiente !" added Saavedra, with covert anger gleaming in his eyes.

"I have no intention of being intrusive," Lennard was beginning, when Maynard interrupted him :

"There is some trickery here; is this Captain Moreno coming on board soon?"

"He is on board now," replied Saavedra, twisting up his huge black moustaches.

"Where?"

"In the saloon awaiting us."

"I shall get the principal aduanero, who is now in the hold, to arrange this matter for me," said Captain Maynard; "Mr. Blair wishes to get on without delay, and my boatswain must also go, that he may anticipate our arrival at Tampico."

On the mention of the aduanero (or custom-house officer), who was then on board in his Mexican uniform, a very marked change came over the face and bearing of Trocadero; and there was an angry if not disturbed expressiou in the face of Captain Moreno, on hearing that the interest of that official might be used in the affair.

This old shipmate of Trebucio Trocadero seemed to be every way his counterpart. His hair and beard were of raven blackness; he wore gold rings in his ears; his figure, which denoted only clumsy strength, was taller perhaps and more bulky than that of Trocadero, but he had the same swarthy visage, the same keen, stealthy, and fierce-looking eyes, and the same cruel mouth. He wore his hair iu a net under a broad-leaved hat of coarse plaited straw, secured to his bull-like neck by a ropeyarn lanyard. A sash of several colours girt his wrist, and the bone haft of a dagger-looking knife appeared stuck in the side of his right boot, just as a Scottish Highlander wears his skene dhu. The shrunken sleeves of his scarlet flannel shirt showed that a crucifix was marked by gunpowder on one arm, while a mermaid with a curling tail adorned the other. He spoke little, but seemed to watch others well and to listen intently. He now warmly agreed—without having the intervention of the Aduanero, of whom he evidently had a professional horror—to take the four passengers to Vera Cruz for twenty-five dollars, including a girl of colour named Jacinta, who would attend upon Donna Dora.

"When do you sail?" asked Maynard, as he paid over the money and docketed a receipt for it.

"We cleared out yesterday, señor," replied Moreno in a thick low voice, as he placed the dollars in his sash; "and though the wind is a head one, we shall start this evening. You may see our gaff topsail loose, from where we are sitting now," he added, pointing to a cutter at anchor about a mile off and nearer in shore than the *Golden Dream*, for

the port of Campeaché is shallow, with a rise of only three feet in the tide.

"A smart-looking craft yours," said Maynard, approvingly; "she sits in the water like a Cowes yacht! Not a usual style of rig in these seas, I should say?"

"On a wind there are not many craft that could overtake her. She was built on the Pacific side, and I actually brought her once round the Horn laden with salted hides."

"What is your cargo composed of now?"

"Oh, the usual kind of things, señor."

"That is no answer, Captain Moreno," said Maynard, who seemed to have some undefined suspicion of this personage.

"Well—logwood, turtle, cotton, and ropes of twisted grass."

"For Vera Cruz?"

"Yes, for the British traders there."

"Crew complete?"

"All, señor, and ready for sea; the cutter is hove short on her cable even now, and might have been outside the horns of the bay by this time, had I not met my old shipmate Trocadero, at La Caza de los Noches, a wine-house near the fort."

"I know the place, Captain Moreno—la Muchacha Amarilla*—and a bad reputation the place has. I should not venture there with many dollars or yellow boys in my pocket."

"Nor I, señor," replied Moreno, with a peculiar laugh. "When may my passengers be on board?"

"Whenever they choose—in an hour, if that will suit Donna Dora?" replied Maynard.

"She will be ready to go in less than that, *now*, I suppose," said Saavedra, with a furtive glance at Lennard, who felt quite as an intruder on him, on Trocadero, and too probably on the captain of *La Gaviota*, but he cared not a rush so long as the arrangement secured for him a few hours more of Dora's society, even under circumstances so adverse as the space of a small vessel afforded.

"Keep a bright look-out on that ere customer—he's an old Francisco pirate, if ever there was one!" was the parting injunction of Jaleel Nutmeg, whispered in Lennard's ear; "as we say of the Kentuck rowdys, he's half alligator and half horse, with a cross of the earthquake, so look out for squalls in crossing the gulf. Keep your bowie-knife loose in

* *i. e.* the Yellow Girl.

your necktie, and chuck it into him like a flash of lightning if he begins to rile you !"

And these ominous words were lingering in Lennard's ear as the boat was shoved off from the *Golden Dream*, after Captain Maynard, politely with cap in hand, had assisted Donna Dora down the side ladder from the starboard paddle-box.

"No more games of chess, I fear, Lennard mio," she whispered, while Blair wrapped her mantle about her in the stern sheets, and Kit Kentledge grasped the yoke-lines to steer.

"And no more music ; I fear there will be little harmony on board the *Gaviota*."

But Lennard little knew how prophetically he spoke.

"Give way, lads—stretch out !" cried Kentledge, and the boat with its freight shot out upon the glassy bay, from the towering side of the *Golden Dream*.

CHAPTER LXII.

LA GAVIOTA.

AMID a sky of fiery haze, by which it was shorn of its beams, the sun, like a vast globe of flaming crimson, sank with tropical rapidity into a sea of the same sanguine hue—the western waters of the mighty Gulf of Mexico. The Bay of Campeaché seemed as if turned to ruddy wine ; the ramparts of the fort and town, the long low polaccas at anchor outside, even the groves of cocoa-trees and the cane brakes that spread almost to the bases of the hills of Yucatan, were all bathed for a time in the same fiery tints, which were deepening fast to violet and to blue, when one of the large metallic quarter-boats of the *Golden Dream*, with the five passengers and the lightest portions of their baggage came sheering alongside the *Gaviota*, whose vast boom-mainsail and gaff hung loose in the brails, while her jib and staysail were half-roused out of the nettings and ready for hoisting.

They were speedily on deck; a hasty "good-bye" was cried in English by the coxswain of the boat ; she shot off on her way back to the ship, and they found themselves left to their own fortunes on board *La Gaviota*, or the *Seagull*. The order was given by Captain Moreno to weigh ; the cable was already hove short, so the anchor was atrip after a heave or two, and being only eight hundredweight or so, it soon hung dripping at the bows, under which the water began to curl

when the orders to "hoist away—let fall—and sheet-home," spread the great boom-mainsail, gaff-topsail, jib and jib-stay-sail, while the cross-jack-yard, which was only used when she went free before the wind, was braced sharp up; and then bending beneath the western breeze, the sloop, which was only of a hundred and fifty tons, careened well over to leeward, as she flew through the water on a long northern tack, heading towards the gulf.

The Bay of Campeaché seemed to close rapidly; the town and fort vanished; and, seated on a camp-stool with Señor José and Lennard Blair smoking silently near her, each muffled in his poncho, Dora, to whom so small a vessel seemed, as it truly was, novel and comfortless in the extreme —gazed somewhat wistfully at the mountain-ranges, whose scalps and peaks were yet tinted by a fiery red, while their bases were lost in hazy blue obscurity below.

The decorations of the *Gaviota* appeared to be unfinished, or of a somewhat varied order; for the sharp nautical eye of Kit Kentledge soon detected, when looking over the gunnel, that she had a narrow red streak on her portside, with a broad white one to starboard. The entire hull was painted of a bright light green colour, outside and inside; her decks were perfectly clean; she had two brass guns, nine-pounders, aft, and all her crew wore knives of an unpleasant length and aspect in their sashes. These fellows were all tatterdemallions, and as picturesque and ruffianly in appearance as shock heads of black hair, unkempt beards and swarthy complexions could make them; and they varied in colour, from dark copper to yellow and red. Old sombreros, nets and nightcaps, were their head-dresses, and their attire consisted only of well-worn red or blue flannel shirts and tattered canvas breeches or slops, girt at the waist by belts or sashes. To Lennard's eye they looked like the pirates of a melodrama; but Dora and her padrino saw in them only coasting Mexican seamen.

"A sweet little craft this is, sir," said Mr. Kentledge in Lennard's ear, "and I would enjoy the voyage uncommonly but for the looks o' these gallows-birds, her skipper and crew."

"More picturesque than pleasant, certainly."

"A rum lot they are, I think; but see how trim and smart she is in her bows, and what a rake aft in everything; with her sheets trimmed as they are now, how lightly she does bend over, lift to windward and then over again, smacking through the breeze and gliding over the wave-tops like a flying fish; and then look aloft—every spar is as taper and

clean as a fishing-rod! Them's the Mexican colours at the gaff-peak; but I don't think as the skipper Moreno cares much what bunting he sails under."

"The skull and crossbones would be more to his taste, you mean?"

"Exactly, sir—only steamers have put such things out o' fashion—'cept in Borneo or the China seas."

Out upon the waters of the gulf now, the increasing size of the waves, the freshening of the breeze, and the occasional showers of spray, compelled Donna Dora to summon from among the crew in the forecastle—where, sooth to say, the damsel seemed very much at home—her new attendant, Jacinta, as she meant to retire below for the night. Lennard having hastened to bring Jacinta (a laughing, rosy, and somewhat pretty girl, with much of tawdry Mexican finery about her, in the form of beads and rings, a truly Mexican scantiness of skirt, a skin like a new doubloon, and eyes as black as sloes)—now proffered his arm to Dora; but he was bluntly anticipated and repelled by Saavedra, who half-led, half-pulled her towards the companion hatch, which she passed through and then descended with difficulty, giving, ere she disappeared, a farewell smile to Lennard. To the latter Saavedra then turned, and endeavouring to steady himself, for now the sloop was pitching heavily, while puffing out his little figure and smoothing his enormous moustaches, he said:

"Now, señor, that we are on board of a Mexican ship, and under the colours of the Republic, permit me to impress upon you that those passing flirtations which the levity of English society, and still more that of the French, allow or sanction, will no longer be tolerated!"

"I do not understand your tone—still less your interference," replied Lennard, haughtily.

"Nor I yours," responded Saavedra, all the more courageously that both Moreno and Trocadero, each with a malevolent smile in his deep eyes and a cigarito in his hairy mouth, were ominously hovering near. "You will bear in mind, señor, that when Donna Dora is below, I have to request your presence on deck—when she is on deck, your presence below!"

"By which arrangement I shall have the pleasure of being on deck all night?"

"Unless you prefer the water—"

"One word more of this, señor," said Lennard, in a fever heat with rage, "and by Heaven I'll fling you overboard!"

The diminutive señor shrunk back on hearing this menace,

which was made with a resolute step towards him. Trocadero, who enjoyed the quarrel, laughed aloud, but Moreno said gruffly:

"Carajo, senores! I'll have no quarrelling on board my ship."

"My passage to Vera Cruz is paid for, Captain Moreno," urged Lennard, who felt himself somewhat helpless and friendless; "I have no desire to intrude on any one—the lady least of all; but I shall claim my right to the use of the cabin, in spite of this little mountebank and his threats."

"That may or may not be," was the sulky and dubious response of Moreno, as he turned away in conference with Saavedra, whom the epithet of *saltimbanco* filled with rage; and resolving that at all hazards he would seek the cabin when the time suited him, Lennard walked forward to the bows of the sloop, which was still flying along the coast. The latter was receding, however, as she sped on her lengthy tack northwards and west.

Lennard now recalled the threats of Trocadero and Saavedra, and felt that policy required him to dissemble, for he was completely at the mercy of these men and their crew of ferocious-looking half-bloods, who, unaware that he knew Spanish, or more probably not caring a jot whether he did so, uttered oaths, jests, and phrases in his hearing that made him shudder.

"Patience!" thought he; "time cures all, and twenty-four hours, if the wind changes, will see us in sight of Vera Cruz."

He felt lonely and inclined to indulge in reverie, for when the lovely moon arose, the great spread of canvas that towered like a cloud from the small hull of *La Gaviota*, in its whiteness and peculiarity of form, made her indeed resemble some vast sea-bird skimming over the deep. Beneath her sharp prow the cleft water bubbled and flashed in diamond showers, while all around the waves seemed full of silvery or phosphorescent light emitted by the enormous quantity of decaying organic and unorganic matter which is for ever sweeping through the Gulf of Mexico from its chief tributary the Mississippi—the "ancient father of rivers."

While leaning over the vessel's side, and gazing dreamily at the bright water, which seemed full of shining monsters as it flew past, Lennard was roughly startled from his reverie by a loud crash close beside him.

"Look out aloft there, you coloured lubber!" cried Kentledge, with an adjective that needs not to be recorded.

"What is the matter?" asked Lennard.

"Matter enough, sir—just look at that ere marlin-spike!"

Above his head he now perceived a man astride the cross-jack-yard at work upon the furled foresail, whistling leisurely, and insolently careless of the catastrophe that might have happened; for he had permitted a sharp-pointed marlin-spike of iron, some pounds in weight, to fall within an inch or two of where Lennard was standing. It penetrated nearly three inches into the solid deck.

"Done o' purpose, sir—done o' purpose; I saw how the beggar let slip the lanyard from his neck," said Kentledge.

"Designedly—do you think so?"

"I do—he acted 'cording to orders, I've no doubt. My advice to you, sir, is to keep always aft and clear o' the rigging; things often fall from aloft in a craft like this, and no warning given."

"The scoundrel! could I be but sure——"

"Hush, sir—have you a pair of pistols in your box?"

"No."

"A bowie-knife, then?"

"Never thought of having such a thing; but why?"

"We may need such tools afore long, for we ain't so safe here as if aboard a Gravesend steamer. They're a bad lot as mans this cutter, sir—a precious bad lot! I don't know much o' their Spanish lingo, but I can gather, Mr. Blair, that you and I are two passengers more than are wanted in the cabin."

Lennard had few fears save for Dora; yet it might be that he and the boatswain were in peril; if so, it would be through the instrumentality of Saavedra and Trocadero, men "accustomed to the lawless licence of a band, where each, with his own right hand, makes the law." Then how much more lawless were such likely to prove upon the open sea! He began to fear then a design upon his life; and if so, the life of the poor boatswain might go too, as the best means of ensuring *his* silence. What so easy as to say that both were washed overboard in the night? and who abroad cares now for British consuls or for British cruisers? So they might pass away for ever, and the Spanish girl, Dora, alone be left to weep for one whose fate she could never unravel. Lennard's dream occurred to him—that painful and exciting vision of himself knocked headlong into the sea—the lights streaming upon him from the cabin windows—the pale, ferocious face of Trocadero, and the paler one of the shrieking Dora, as he drifted away to drown, unheeded and unaided, astern! Was that dream but a foreshadowing of events now close at hand? To Trocadero,

we have said, it was evident that Lennard knew something more of his past and recent history than he cared any man should know—and live.

"For to-night, at least, we must watch and sleep by turns, Kentledge," said Lennard.

"Agreed, sir; but I wishes I had sommat else to watch with than this old jack-knife."

"Life is a strange game of hazard, after all; and, like every other game, owes too often less to skill and forethought than to chance or fortune."

"In other words, sir, you mean——"

"Destiny!" said Lennard, gloomily.

"I doesn't know much about what that may be, sir; but this I knows, that the best years o' my life have been spent aloft—between heaven and ocean—between God's blessed sea and God's blessed sky; and, hap what may, I ain't afear'd o' this coloured lot, d—n me if I am!"

"Well, Kit, don't let them see us too much together, or that we suspect them."

"I am not such a poor player as to show them my hand, till the time comes to clench it, believe me."

Without undressing, Kit Kentledge and Lennard slept by turns, "spell and spell about," as the former phrased it, on the lockers in the cabin, where for some hours the Captains Moreno and Trocadero sat drinking Leeward Island rum and toying with Jacinta, the camarera of Donna Dora. The night passed without adventure or interruption, and when day broke, *La Gaviota* was still carecring northward and west, braced sharp up against the west wind. Whether she had made a southward tack in the night, they knew not, for the surly skipper and crew were averse to afford any information on the subject.

CHAPTER LXIII.

WHAT KENTLEDGE HEARD.

This day was to reveal more of prospective danger to the occupants of the cabin than they could have deemed probable. The weather was rough and lowering, so Dora spent most of the time in the comfortless little cabin, while Lennard, to avoid any annoyance on the part of Saavedra, remained chiefly on deck, conversing with Kentledge and solacing himself with a cigar.

To Dora, the close, ill-savoured and dingy little cabin of the *Gaviota* seemed squalid and miserable, after the spacious

and gorgeous saloon of the *Golden Dream*. The buccaneer aspect of Moreno appalled her, while the forward and clumsily flippant bearing of Trocadero and of Jacinta excited her anger. She felt exasperated against Señor José, whose too jealous care of her had placed her under circumstances of such discomfort, when a few days' delay at a posada in Campeaché would have enabled them all to proceed by the English steamer; so she reckoned every hour she spent on board as one passed in a species of corporeal purgatory.

Lennard, on his part, of course did not regret that for her sake he had left the splendid steam liner; but he secretly reprobated the incautious policy of Saavedra in placing himself and Dora in a situation which already proved one of peril to both, and might ere long end in disgrace and death to her! In the morning, when assisted by Jacinta to dress, Donna Dora found that gay quadroon careless even to insolence, and by no means disposed to submit, even in the least degree, to the angry petulance of a proud young lady. The camarera's person, too, proved unpleasantly redolent of negro-head tobacco and of aguardiente de Azucar—or Leeward Island rum. Thrice during the day Dora came on deck to entreat Saavedra to remain beside her in the cabin, and on these occasions Lennard Blair could perceive that her eyes were full of tears and her cheek inflamed by anger, which she was at no pains to conceal. In truth, Jacinta had been seating herself on the knee of Manuel Moreno, who kissed and toyed with her before the very eyes of Donna Dora, to whom Trocadero made more than one flattering speech, the import of which she could not mistake, so she became filled with anger and fear. When Lennard, who was somewhat deficient in the essential virtue of Job, haughtily and firmly ventured to remonstrate, Moreno threw aside all disguise, if indeed he ever assumed any.

"Señor, be wary," said he, "or a loop and a leap from the arm of the cross-jack-yard are all I'll give you."

"Dare you to threaten me?" was the resolute rejoinder.

"Small daring there is in that," said Moreno, with a scornful laugh; "but hark you, Señor Administrador—for such I understand you are,—the world consists of two classes,—scoundrels and fools. I am content to be a scoundrel; but don't you seek to be a fool and throw your life away before your time—and for a chit-faced girl too. As for your life, we mean to give you a chance for it *ashore;* but if you meddle with me aboard my own ship—morte de Dios!"

He ground his teeth and touched the handle of his knife, with ferocious significance. The rum-bottle stood perpetu-

ally on the cabin table, and it was frequently applied to, though neither quadrant nor chart were thought of. Lennard saw all this. He looked forward to the coming night with intense anxiety, and was constantly sweeping the horizon with his glass for a passing sail; but even the slender hope of such protection slipped away, for not even a seabird was to be seen, breaking the monotony of the world of water around the flying *Gaviota*.

Kit Kentledge, who marvelled at the duration of the tacks northward as compared with the cutter's southing, often consulted her course by a passing glance at the compass; but was always warned gruffly to "stand clear of the binnacle, and mind his own business."

In the course of this inauspicious day Moreno quarrelled with one of his crew, a tall, dark and swarthy fellow named Miguel Galvez, from Barquismeta, in the Spanish Main, whom he had detected whispering with Jacinta in the forecastle. Arming his right hand with an implement known among seamen as the "brass-knuckles," with his left he seized the throat of Miguel, and cruelly and savagely beat him about the face and head, till his features were obscured by blood, and the unfortunate fellow was well-nigh blinded. Lennard attempted to interfere by seizing the uplifted hand of Moreno, who instantly drew a pistol from his sash, exclaiming,—"Par el santo de los Santos! but I'll serve you the same way or worse, if you aid a vile mutineer (amotinador)."

Panting with rage, Moreno descended to his rum-bottle in the cabin, and the mutilated Miguel Galvez crawled away to the forecastle to scheme out vengeance, while his shipmates soused his head with salt-water and bound up his wounds. This outrageous conduct, and the general bearing of all on board, rendered Lennard doubly anxious for the issue of the voyage; and a climax was put to his fears, when, sometime after the recent uproar, he was joined by Kentledge, who whispered,—"Sir, I have reason to fear that this here *Gaviota* is not bound for Vera Cruz at all."

"For where then, in Heaven's name?"

"T'other place would become her style o' crew better; but I think she's bound for some port on the northern side of the Gulf."

"I cannot understand this. Her size is so small—her rig so peculiar for these seas; but her consignment and papers must have borne that she was cleared out for Vera Cruz."

"True; but they'll doctor their log, if they keep one at all; and they may have two sets of papers aboard. Did you never hear of a merchant keeping two sets o' books?

There's some scheme a-foot for keeping the young lady till she is ransomed by her father—if *then* he'll think her worth ransoming. Old Saavedra is worth a pot o' money, and they say his signature will make their fortunes. Meantime, they are for having a spree on some island in the Gulf, with a grab at the girls and the passengers' luggage."

"How have you learned all this, Kentledge?" asked Lennard in a breathless whisper, and with intense anxiety.

"From the chap that was knuckledusted; he told me as much in his rage. Moreno and Trocadero are, as you may see, half-savages by nature, and have both been Coolie crimps; and as for their entire crew, only that the barracoons are empty and this craft ain't the rig for the coast, I would think she was a West African pleasure boat, outward bound, with black passengers under hatches."

"Slaver and pirate seem indeed written in the faces of all these men."

"Yes, sir; but then all furriners have a rum look to an Englishman's eye."

Trocadero and Saavedra had been close companions during the first evening, and had held many conferences together; but Lennard now perceived an estrangement between them; a constraint on the part of the former, and a haughty aversion on that of the latter, who was a retired merchant of Tampico, and one of the richest men in the province. He had seen or detected something in the two skippers which served to excite his alarm, pride, and anger. Anxious only for Dora's safety, and stung to the heart by the surmises and grave communications of Kentledge, Lennard, dissembling his dislike to Saavedra, took an opportunity of drawing near him when he was alone.

"Señor," said he in a low voice, "may I crave a word with you?"

Saavedra bowed coldly, and without the faintest vestige of a smile.

"I have a question to ask——"

"Ask it."

"About what time this evening, think you, may we be in sight of land?"

"The captain alone knows—how should I?"

"The captain knows more than he is likely to impart either to you or to me," said Lennard, and a deep glance was exchanged between him and Saavedra.

"You share my suspicions of falsity and of intended foul play," said the latter.

"I do most fully. I have been warned that there is a

scheme on board to touch at some other port or island in the Gulf——"

"This but confirms my fears!" said Saavedra, whose voice sunk into a husky whisper as he made a violent effort to control his emotion, for Moreno was at that moment on deck, but looking keenly to windward, where the evening star could be seen twinkling above the wave-tops. "In seeking to save Dora Dominga, my dear old friend's daughter, from your intrusive advances—I am plain with you, señor, but pardon me, for I am your superior, at least in years—I have placed her life, yea, more than her life, and all our lives, it may be, in deadly peril. Better had we waited a month—even a year—at Campeaché till the *Golden Dream* was refitted and ready to proceed, than have ventured forth in such a vessel as this!"

"Then what is to be done now?"

"Madre de Dios! what *can* be done; but watch, and wait, and pray?"

"And endure and suffer when the time comes," added Lennard, bitterly; "we are but three men, and unarmed, to thirteen."

"Then," said Saavedra, inquiringly, "can yonder boatswain be trusted?"

Lennard looked to where Kentledge, with his hands in his pockets, his outspread feet planted on the deck, his round glazed hat stuck on the nape of his neck, and his bluff, weatherbeaten, honest English face turned inquiringly to windward, seemed the beau-ideal of a British tar.

"Trusted!" echoed Lennard, with a bitter laugh; "would to Heaven we had but three more like him!"

Unarmed and upon the open sea, Lennard felt himself alone the protector—if such he could be called—of that fair and delicate young girl; for Señor José was a feeble fool, Kentledge had himself to protect, Trocadero was a designing ruffian, and the girl Jacinta a worthless creature.

"Oh," thought Lennard, as he struck his foot on the deck in vexation of spirit, and as a somewhat unwonted gust of ferocity swelled his heart; "oh, for a brace of pistols, that I might make the lives of two of those wretches pay the penalty of Dora's and my own!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN THE GULF OF MEXICO.

THE weather was getting more and more rough, and by the time that evening drew on it had freshened to "half a gale"

as the sailors phrase it. The cutter was still making long tacks against a head wind, and Lennard hoped that ere night fell the land would be in sight; but he bent his gaze westward in vain. Ere this, according to what Señor Saavedra had told him, the mighty volcanic summit of Orizaba—the most elevated mountain in New Spain—should have been visible.

Frequent conferences took place between Moreno, Trocadero, and some of the crew; and Lennard could gather that these worthies had become somewhat bewildered as to their whereabouts; so evening deepened fast into night, and still the light sloop flew on. The moon was nearly full; but masses of cloud intervened at times, throwing swift shadows and uncertain obscurities upon the ocean. The wind was becoming unsteady, and blew occasionally in strong gusts. At one time the *Gaviota* would be shooting on smoothly and silently through the rolling sea; at another the waves would whiten, become frothy, and burst in foam and fury over her bows, sending the hissing spray aft to the taffrail.

At last the grand silver disc of the Mexican moon was completely hidden in masses of dusky vapour, and there was no light upon the sea save the faint rays that flickered from the binnacle lamp of the *Gaviota*. An intuitive motion of doubt kept Kentledge the boatswain on deck; Saavedra, weary of pacing to and fro there during the entire day, had dozed off to sleep in his berth without undressing, and Donna Dora reclined on the stern-locker asleep, with her head on Lennard's shoulder, and her eyes closed placidly, for she knew nothing of the multitude of perils that surrounded her. Her breathing was long and regular; her dark lashes rested on her rounded cheeks, and there was a calm beauty in her face, on which some passing thought in her half slumber had left a gentle smile. Lennard's cheek propped her head, and the silken masses of her golden hair fell over his breast. He held his poncho round her, and there they were seated, hand in hand, she sleeping and he acutely awake, when suddenly he heard sounds on deck—sounds that were louder than usual.

The hoarse voice of Moreno was heard to shout, "Hard a-port, timonero—hard a-port with the helm instantly."

The order was at once obeyed, for Lennard felt the position and motion of the cutter changed, and the flapping and jibbing of the great boom-mainsail overhead as she came sharply up on the starboard tack. But now the bustle increased, and several voices exclaimed in terror—"Rocas—escollas y rocas! (Rocks and breakers.) Cuidado, capitano mio—cuidado, por amor de Dios!"

At these alarming cries Lennard softly quitted the side of Dora, and rushed on deck to behold a very appalling sight. Through a shapeless mass of torn and ragged-looking cloud, the pale moon was peeping forth, half hidden and half seen, and by the cold and partial gleams she cast along the desolate sea, he could behold a reef of black rocks, over the ridgy back of which the water was boiling in white and sullen fury; and these rocks were close under the lee-bow of the *Gaviota*, while beyond them rose an obscure mass, which seemed at first to be a dark fog-bank, but which rapidly assumed the aspect of an island.

"Up all hands; clear away the anchors!" cried Moreno, who certainly exerted himself manfully to save his little vessel, and Trocadero seconded his efforts, and did a vast amount of blustering and swearing in deep and sonorous Spanish. "Presto, hombres! haul aft the lee jib-sheet."

Both orders were rapidly obeyed; the anchors were cleared, and the sheet hauled aft, amid the stamping of feet, the crashing of blocks, the whistling of the wind and the gear together.

"La vela mayor—peak the mainsail," was his next order.

"Maledicion!" cried the seamen, for, while they were obeying this command, the lee jib-sheet parted.

With a dreadful oath Trocadero now rushed to the bows, and cried—"Haul in the weather jib-sheet and the staysail halyards, or it is all over with us, Manuel Moreno!"

A shriek of "Ave Maria purissima!" rose from all, for at that moment there was a crash, as the cutter's keel struck a sunken rock; the tall mast shivered like a fishing-rod; its stays flew out in bights and bends, and the bewilderment of the crew increased.

"Let go the best bower anchor to hold her on."

"Stop! no, no, 'tis useless," cried Trocadero; "the next sea will break her back. A los infernos! quick, men, taut a-peak the mainsail, and clear away the boats."

By this time the doomed cutter was crashing full upon the rocks, her timbers started, her outer and inner sheathing bulged, gaping, and the water pouring into her fast. Lennard rushed below and brought up Dora, who had heard with terror and bewilderment the uproar on deck. At that moment, as she clung to him in her wild alarm, she seemed far more beautiful than he had ever thought her before; yet her cheek was blanched now, and looked deadly pale in the cold moonlight; her dark eyes were dilated, and her bright hair was all ruffled out.

"Be calm, I besech you," he whispered; "there is danger, great danger, my beloved, but——"

"I don't fear it while you are with me, and while your arm protects me, dear, dear Lennard: mi vida—amor mio!"

He whispered other words in incoherent haste, to comfort and encourage, but they failed to assure the trembling girl, though, in the fulness of her great love, she felt that death would lose half its bitterness if they shared it together, and in each other's arms.

"A precious mess these here Spanish lubbers have got *us* into," grumbled Kit Kentledge to Lennard; "as for themselves, I don't care a dump if every man-jack o' them go to old Harry."

"Moreno has been wrong in his steering all day, señor," said a Spaniard in Lennard's ear, and with an exulting, but fiendish smile glittering in his black eyes. "The compass worked wild—ha! ha!—that was my doing—*mine!*"

"Yours—how, fellow?"

"I put an iron marlin-spike into the binnacle, so the power of the needle was vitiated," replied the man in whom Lennard now recognized Miguel Galvez, the seaman who had been so lately beaten with brass-knuckles. "Señor Inglese, I heard him propose to land on an islet in the Gulf, to have some frolics with the Spanish lady and her maid, and to leave you there marooned—ashore, but to starve and die—that was the Señor Saavedra's suggestion yesterday. Demonio! but to be wrecked thus is more than any of them bargained for," added the fellow, with a horrible laugh, while they could actually feel the vessel going to pieces under their feet.

The hull lifted a little at first, and then heeled over to starboard, as the rocks pierced her like mighty teeth, and the sea began to break over the deck.

"Stand by me, Kentledge, till we can get the lady ashore," cried Lennard, embracing Dora with one arm, and half lifting her as the water flowed over her ankles.

"The island is close beyond the reef, sir — one might chuck a biscuit on it; but the water between is deep, and still, apparently: let us try for the long-boat."

But a fierce exclamation of anger and contempt escaped Kentledge, as the Spanish seamen, in getting the boat off its chocks over the main-hatch, let it slip through their hands, just as a sea struck the wreck amidships, and away it went, crashing through the bulwarks to leeward, where it was swamped under the cutter's counter, and three or four of the crew were washed away with it. Lennard kept Dora's face turned away, lest she might see these poor drowning creatures disappear in succession, after futile struggles, amid the

tumultuous breakers that boiled and roared over the black ridge of the roof.

"Lower away the quarter boat—stand by the fall-tackles!" cried Moreno, and with the sailor-like assistance and the strong hands of Kit Kentledge it was lowered and brought safely under the lee quarter with one seaman and the Señor Saavedra in her—for fear endued that little personage with a wonderful amount of tact and activity.

"Now," cried Trocadero, "the Señora first."

And with a sob in his throat and a prayer in his heart, Lennard assisted her over the side, and saw her safe in the tossing boat below.

"Now, sir," cried Kentledge, "follow—drop in quick!"

But Trocadero thrust him back furiously with the muzzle of a cocked pistol, crying—"Maldita! back I say, and let your betters into the boat first—back or I'll put a brace of bullets into your skull; such ballast has sent many a better man to his last bed in these waters. Hand over the girl, Jacinta—presto, hombres!"

Moreno handed her over the side and she lightly dropped into the boat, where now some five or six of the crew were seated. The captain was about to follow, when a blow from behind—a dreadful stroke from a handspike, and dealt doubtless by Miguel Galvez, tumbled him into the sea, to rise no more.

"Lennard—Lennard!" cried Dora in imploring accents as she started up in the boat, but was instantly dragged down by a man whose arm was round her.

Lennard was about to get over the gunnel, when he was again thrust back by the pistol of Trocadero, who said with a grin of intense malignity, and a hiss in his voice—"You took some interest once about wrecks in the Bahama Channel—par dios! How do you like one in the Gulf of Mexico?"

The thrust was so violent that Lennard fell on the wet deck, and when again he reached the gunnel, he found with rage and despair that the boat with the mocking Trocadero, the screaming Dora, the girl Jacinta, and some six or seven others, had shoved off. He saw nothing of Kentledge, and found himself alone on the wreck, which was going fast to pieces!

"A la rocas! to the rocks—the shore!" he heard the voice of Trocadero crying as the men bent to their oars, and the boat vanished from his sight, in wreck, mist, and obscurity, as clouds veiled the moon; and with a wild shout, in which grief, and hope, and terror mingled, Lennard cast off his cap and cloak, dropped from the bowsprit of the cutter—the

point of her that lay farthest beyond the reef, and where the water was smooth—and then he struck out for the island.

Fortunately he could swim well and the distance was short, but he felt the long, wavy, and slimy reeds or trailers that grow among the sea rocks in tropical regions—at times a hundred feet in length—twining round his limbs and impeding his exertions, while the fear of ground sharks chilled the marrow in his bones. But he prayed to heaven that he might be spared to reach the shore, the island to which Dora had been taken, and by the unscrupulous Trocadero.

CHAPTER LXV.

DORA ON THE ISLAND.

STEERED by Trocadero, the boat, which seemed to vanish from Lennard's sight, rounded a little promontory, and entered a patch of deep and smooth water, on each side of which rose dark rocks, some ten or fifteen feet in height. A gleam of moonshine revealed a kind of sandy creek, into which he carefully ran the boat, and beached her. Leaping ashore, he desired the others to follow him. Dora was the last who quitted the boat, which the wary Trocadero ordered at once to be pulled up high and dry on the sand, to prevent its being floated off; for this boat might yet be their only means of succour or escape.

Like all impulsive women, Dora soon expended her strength in cries and tears for Lennard, and in reproaching with scorn and bitterness Trocadero, Saavedra, and every man in succession for abandoning him to his fate; and now, when lifted from the boat, she was so overcome by the whole events of the night, that sobs of anguish were all she could utter, as she was half led and half supported by Saavedra and Jacinta a little way inland from the beach, for now the sound of the sea, as it chafed on the rocks, distressed her keenly by the association of ideas.

"Lennard drowned—Lennard lost—lost for ever!" she continued to moan, for now in her deep sorrow she made no secret of her love for him and kissed again and again the ring he had placed on her finger. This emotion won her some sympathy from Jacinta, till the damsel grew weary of it; but none whatever from Señor Saavedra. In one way he did not regret the loss of Lennard as a lover—indeed, in this instance he felt grateful to the evil genius who brought about the accident; but in another, he certainly missed alike the presence of Lennard and of Kentledge, who as civilized

and resolute men, might have defended Dora and himself from any insults to which Trocadero and the survivors of the crew might subject them; for he knew these men to be utterly lawless, and that the islet on which they had landed, like others in the Gulf of Mexico, was doubtless totally uninhabited.

The six survivors of the crew were now in vehement dispute as to whether the scene of their misadventure were the isle of Vermeja, or the Arenas; perhaps it might prove the shoals and rocks known as the Triangles; and Trocadero, though he knew pretty well every key and reef in the Gulf, was unable to solve the difficulty. One fact he was assured of, they had not been wrecked among the Alicranes (which are three islets, Perez, Chica, and Pajaroz, connected by a dangerous shoal), as they lay too near the coast of Yucatan.

Break of day enabled them to perceive that the locality consisted of two islands, with a strip of deep water between them. One was high and rocky, and that on which they found themselves was about two miles in circumference, flat, and covered by rich herbage and trees. The sweet pea and the myrtle-leaved vine grew in sheltered spots, and the nightly-blooming cereus sprung from clefts and fissures on the rocks. A few palms and plantains afforded shelter for the birds, and the whole isle was matted by a jungle of verdure, creepers, wild tobacco, the jenequen plant (of which coarse thread is made in Yucatan), pepper, and gourds, from amid which came the hum of insect life as the dawn drew on and the sun rose above the sea; and then many a huge tortoise was seen crawling on the white sand in the little creeks and inlets.

Señor Saavedra repeatedly wrung his hands, as he thought of the lost luxuries and ease to which he was accustomed, but might never more enjoy, and of the wealth he had amassed by long years of industry and successful speculation, but which would now, perhaps, go to the enrichment of others. He heard with terror the proposals of the crew, who were by no means satisfied with the extent of the island prison on which they had been cast. Miguel Galvez urged that they should victual the boat with gourds, pumpkins, and tortoises, and anything they might recover from the wreck, and then put to sea, if no sail appeared within twenty-four hours. They were without a compass; but a seaman, who was a Yucataco, declared that he could steer them towards his native peninsula by the stars; "but then our boat is so small," he added, "and we are nine."

"The señor and the two girls can be left behind till we could send them succour," replied Galvez.

To put to sea or remain alike filled the soul of Saavedra with horror, and while deploring his evil fortune, he entreated the Yucataco, who seemed less rough than his fellows, to form a kind of bower of palm-leaves for Dora, under the shelter of a rock, and there, with Jacinta, she lay down exhausted, heedless and oblivious apparently of those about her, keeping her eyes closed while she moaned and muttered, mingling little ejaculations of love and sorrow with her prayers.

"Oh! Jacinta," said she, in a low voice, "I learned too soon to idolize him; and by the loss of him heaven is now punishing me for my idolatry."

"Caramba!" said the uninterested Jacinta, "what then, señora? There are more men in the world, and you may be happy yet—that is, if we were once out of this horrible island."

"Happy!" resumed Dora, with a torrent of tears; "I have been happy, oh, so happy with him; and, though past, too surely, for ever, the remembrance of that joy is dear."

Jacinta shrugged her shoulders. She did not understand all this. She had seen too many lovers in her time to set much store on one in particular. Meanwhile the day wore on, and the hot sun of the Tropic of Cancer mounted high overhead. The seamen, after exploring the island—a task soon accomplished—were desired by Trocadero, whose authority over them was tacitly accepted, to seek the vicinity of the wreck and search for food and fuel. The *débris* that was strewn on the beach afforded both, for the mast, with much of its gear, the shattered longboat, and much of the timber and sheathing, had come ashore, with portions of the cargo, logwood, coils of grass-rope, and so forth; and with these a keg or two of biscuits, beef, and flour, all more or less damaged by immersion. A spring was found on the island, but its water was brackish almost to bitterness.

Trocadero knew that all these islands in the Gulf of Mexico lay chiefly near the coast of Yucatan, and were so environed by reefs and shoals, that navigators sedulously avoided them; and by stating this, he crushed the hope that lingered in Saavedra's heart of a speedy release. Incited by the expectation of finding a case of wine or spirits, the survivors of the crew continued to hover near the broken wreck. The body of Manuel Moreno was washed upon the beach, sorely mutilated by a shark's teeth, and interred in the sand without much ceremony, save the investigation of his pockets. Meanwhile Trocadero remained near the bower formed for Dora, and having ordered Saavedra to ascend a

rock at a distance, "and keep a bright look-out till he was wanted" (an order which the señor felt himself constrained to obey, as the captain indicated the said rock by pointing to it with his pistol), and despatching Jacinta to prepare some cakes of the flour and toast them in a fire which Galvez had lighted, he betook himself to the pleasing, but not very progressive, task of attempting to soothe the grief of the young lady, concerning whom he had already formed some very daring schemes.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CAPTAIN TROCADERO AS A LOVER.

A BANASTA, or small keg of Leeward Island rum, had come ashore from the wreck, and this had been speedily pierced and its contents distributed among the crew, each of whom had a copious draught of the fiery and potent liquid from the shell of a cleft cocoa-nut. Trocadero had more than enough to make him unusually brutal and reckless, and in this mood he drew near the place where Dora yet reclined, alone and faint, under the shelter of the palm-leaves, abandoned to suffering, fear, and sorrow, and the weakness endured by lack of nourishment.

José Saavedra, in terror of his life being taken, was still hovering aloof, and Jacinta, who had grown weary of her mistress's complaints and sorrow, and who had come in for a fair share of the ruddy contents of the banasta, was now dancing the manolo for the amusement of Miguel Galvez and others on the sandy beach where the boat lay, and not far from Moreno's new-made grave.

There was much of insolent triumph in the heart and in the eyes of Trocadero as he crept on—for his stealthy and crouching pace seemed to be literally creeping—for he recalled the cool and cutting bearing of the beautiful and high-bred girl during the voyage of the *Golden Dream*, and a strange emotion of fierce and revengeful satisfaction mingled with the bold hardihood of purpose which the desperation of their circumstances inspired. He found her totally in his power, totally and without aid, unless Heaven sent it, for with the idea of the puny little Saavedra the captain did not trouble himself. He drew near where she had passed the day under the shelter of a rock, over the brow of which many a brilliant trailer and the flowers of the cereus, now opening their petals to the moon, were hanging, and where fine broad and fan-like leaves of the date palm, skilfully

adjusted by the Yucataco, drooped over her, forming a graceful and fairy-like little bower, which had parried the hot beams of the tropical sun by day, and now received the falling dew of night.

Dora had dropped asleep, after passing a wretched day, during which she had felt at times calm—but it was the calmness of stupor; at others, the wildest grief and terror, when with each pulsation of her poor little heart, there seemed to shoot through it the bitterness of years upon years!

The vile hubbub of the tipsy crew, and their voices as they sang round the dancer of the manolo, mingled at times with the murmur of the moonlit sea; but Dora heard them not, and Trocadero, while stooping he gazed upon her, grew suddenly fearful that the facts of her existence and helplessness might be remembered by their shipmates, and that a scene of outrage would then ensue. At the thought of this he ground his strong white teeth, and felt for the butts and locks of the pistols in his sash. The moon was now shining on the sea, which rippled in silver sheen around that lonely isle. The little clumps of plantains and cocoa-trees, with their great clusters of nuts and tufted foliage, stood up in dark outline between the moonlight and the lurker, who, after casting a stealthy glance around him, again turned his dark, glittering eyes on the sleeping girl, who lay so completely at his mercy. He could admire the delicately-moulded arm, on which the soft, round cheek reposed, with its long lashes wet with oozing tears; the swelling bust, half-woman and half-girl in its development; and all her air of helplessness and sweet perfection; and yet they stirred no kind, or tender, or holy thought in the arid heart of this truculent sea-wolf. A sound startled him, and the great, coarse hand which he held over her, like a tiger's paw, was withdrawn. What was it?

"Porquerias! it was but the voices of those borachios on the beach; yet if they should come!" he muttered, and felt in his heart that he would rather pistol her in her sleep than see her become the prey of others.

There was somewhat of method and a lucrative view to a future time in the present proceedings and evil promptings in the heart of Trebucio Trocadero.

"If I can make this girl mine—mine by force or fraud, by fair means or foul means—her father who is so rich might think it the most reputable alternative to leave her with me altogether. What if she should marry me to mend an ugly story? There are worse dry docks wherein to repair damages than the church of San Juan at Vera Cruz! Trocadero

courage—courage, amigo mio ; there are doubloons in sacksful awaiting you in yonder villa near Orizaba, if, demonio, you ever get there."

In another moment Dora was rudely awakened from her slumber, and a half-stifled cry of terror escaped her, half-stifled by the rough, coarse, and impure kiss of Trocadero, in whose strong grasp she found herself. Then the extremity of terror endued her with unnatural strength, for she contrived nimbly to elude his grasp and spring to her feet; but, intercepting flight, he still kept her between himself and the face of the rock, at the base of which the palm-leaves were now trod flat, and the girl appeared in all her defiant beauty, her cheek flushing, her eyes sparkling, and her hair, like masses of golden thread, dishevelled in the full blaze of the moonlight.

"Stand back, insolent wretch !" she exclaimed, her figure seeming to dilate, while every fibre trembled with rage.

"How dare you, señor ?"

"Dare, did you say, señora ?"

"Have you mistaken me for the girl Jacinta ?"

"Par dios, I have not," replied Trocadero, rubbing his coarse hands with tipsy glee.

"Have you forgotten that I am a lady—"

"Whom I have in my power to make or to mar—to preserve next my heart, or smash like a clay gallipot. A lady ? Demonio, I wouldn't give the value of a burnt castagno for the price of your ladyship, here as I have you now, in this isle of the devil knows what, in the Gulf of Mexico ! Come, señora, don't be a fool ; make a friend, a lover of the only man that can protect you," he continued, trying again to grasp her ; but she skilfully eluded him. "Don't quarrel," he added, assuming the persuasive; "pray don't, nina de mi alma—angel mio, let us kiss and be friends."

"Oh that I had a pistol !" moaned Dora, in a husky voice, while her little white hands were clenched tightly and spasmodically.

"Such a little spitfire it is ! A pistol, indeed ! I shouldn't like you to cover me with such an implement in your present mood, my pretty one."

They stood for a moment surveying each other. The eyes of the ruffian were expressive only of tipsy ardour and a hideous spirit of love-making—a pitiless joy that a girl of great beauty was completely in his power, where neither pride nor position could avail her. She, on the other hand, inspired by an utter horror—a terrible sense of the truth that she was at this man's mercy; that Jacinta had mockingly left

her; that she was to become the victim of him, and, it might be, of his fellows; so her trembling heart forgot to beat, and a mortal paleness overspread her features. She knew that the insolence of a gentleman, inflamed by wine, might be quelled by a glance; but here, nor words, nor prayers, nor strength might avail her! and yet, with a painful sob in her throat, she gave up an unuttered petition for succour to God and our Lady of Guadaloupe!

To a man like Trocadero, who considered purity a sham, virtue a chimera, and proper pride but the insolence of fortuitous position, Donna Dora's intense fear and abhorrence, which replaced her first emotion of fiery indignation, served but to provoke and inflame him, and with a muttered imprecation, he resolutely grasped her again. She cast a glance of wild despair at the sea, glittering like silver in the moonlight beyond the clump of palms. Could she but reach it—Lennard was there! Then her thoughts flashed home; her father on whom she doted, and who doted on her as the last of his family—who was looking lovingly forward to a reunion with her, after a separation that had seemed so long—was she never indeed to see his face again?

"Compose yourself, mi vida," said Trocadero in a coaxing voice, as she writhed in his powerful hands, while he spoke through his teeth, for his ferocious temper was rising fast; "compose yourself, and don't bring those drunken devils upon us from yonder beach. Remember only this—and think over it, if you *can* think at all—that you are in my power absolutely and wholly, and that none other can save you."

"O Madre de Dios!—O blessed Heavens above me!—for what am I reserved?" implored the shuddering girl. "Mercy—mercy, Señor Trocadero—as you hope for mercy!"

"Mercy where and when? Pho!"

"At the hour of death—at the last day!"

"To struggle thus is childish. What, you will bite me, will you, wasp? If you do, par cielo y fuego infernal, I'll give you a knock on the head with my clenched hand that shall keep you quiet enough for a time!"

A wailing cry of despair escaped Dora, who was sinking on her knees, for the great and muscular hand of Trocadero was clenched for his atrocious purpose; but ere he could uplift it, he was struck to the earth by a terrible blow—felled literally like a bullock,—and the now half fainting Donna Dora found herself in the grasp of—another!

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE ARENAS.

As Lennard had swum on beyond the reef, he heard a tremendous crash behind, and knew that it was the fall of the mast and the total breaking up of the *Gaviota;* when he was able to look round, every vestige of her had disappeared, or was floating about as splintered driftwood, tossed in the eddies near the reef. He swam doggedly and sturdily on for some fifty yards, and found himself under an impending rock, up the slippery face of which he sought in vain to climb, but after every effort, fell back panting and breathless into deep water. Then for the first time did a horror of being drowned chill his heart, for he knew all that Dora might suffer on the island; thirst and hunger, heat and cold, exposure to the elements, and more than all these, to insult, for she was in the power of lawless men. For himself he might land only to perish by the hands of Trocadero or others, being alone and totally unarmed; but existence was dear, and struggling to save it, he swam a little to the left and found himself washed by the surf upon a shelf of flat rock. He had scarcely attained this place of temporary safety, when a pale and phosphorescent light shot past under the surface of the water he had just quitted, and his blood curdled, for he knew that it was emitted by the shining scales of a white shark, the largest and most voracious of all its species, the dread of sailors in all warm climates, for they dart at a man in the water "as a gudgeon darts at a worm."

Above Lennard the rock rose perpendicularly; he had no means of climbing it, and for more than an hour made futile attempts to do so ere he desisted, and still wet and dripping after his immersion, with an emotion very much akin to despair in his heart, he sat down on the shelf of rock to think over his situation. The tide was ebbing, for the water had ceased to overflow it; but when it turned, how high might the water rise? High enough to wash him off; high enough to place him within reach of some devouring shark perhaps, and certainly he had no desire to perish like Bryan in the ballad of Perene. Then he had a natural horror of being drowned, for ere he reached that shelf of rock he had twice, as he sunk, heard the roar of water rushing in his ears, with that strange sound which the half-drowned describe as being like the ringing of church bells, and he shuddered as he recalled the soothing but terrible sensation of the ocean closing

over him! Again he made a frantic effort to climb, and again he sank down exhausted. Then he thought of swimming off to some other point of the isle, but those white lines of wavering light that shot to and fro under the water were more than sufficient to appal and deter him.

"Was there ever a poor devil so unfortunate, so ill-fated as I? And but for that scoundrel Trocadero," he thought, "I should now have been safe in the boat!"

And there was Dora! How was he to rejoin, to reach and aid her? How to acquaint her that he still lived, and so save her from those pangs which he knew she must suffer. Lived! But what a death might he die, if those who survived of the crew sailed away in the boat, or boats—he knew not the number of either—and left him on that shelf of rock, exposed to hunger and thirst, to the chill dews of night and the fierce tropical sun by day, till in madness and despair he should plunge into the sea and anticipate his doom! These and many more such wild and terrible thoughts—anticipations such as tormented him when lost in the coal-mine—coursed through his mind now, for he possessed an acute and powerful imagination, and so possessed the ample means of tormenting himself. He could but hope that daylight might reveal some prospect of relief, some means by which to ascend from his present place; thus he had no resource but to wait and watch the return of the tide, which fortunately was not a high one, and when full barely rippled against the edge of the rock on which he sat. So, with his mind tormented by anxiety for Dora's safety and his own escape, he had to endure the long, long hours of the silent night till they passed away, and then watch the beams of the sun, as, with tropical swiftness, they shot upward in fiery lines upon the sky, radiating from the horizon, and after a time, from thence a broad and wondrous pathway of brilliance shone along the water to the rocks of the island. The waves lifted their blue tops in golden light, and the surf that curled over the reef sparkled like showers of diamonds and prisms of every rainbow hue.

But not a sail was visible on the vast expanse of sea; and, from the point where Lennard sat, the rocks of the isle seemed to recede, so it became evident that he was perched, most tantalizingly, on a kind of promontory. From the brow of the cliff above his head, some long green tendrils or trailers grew downward; but, even could he have reached them, they were too feeble to have borne his weight in any attempt to climb. He now resorted to shouting again and again. Some wild birds flew out of their nests in the rocks

and wheeled in circles about him ; but his cries met with no other reponse. The morning sun was hot—oppressively so ; after the night he had passed, Lennard's throat was parched with thirst, which he was totally without the means of allaying, so he now began to endure the *first* instalment of the horrors he had pictured or anticipated last night. Again he shouted wildly and hoarsely ; and this time his heart gave a bound, for he heard an undoubted reply !

"Holloa, below there !" cried a familiar voice above him ; "is it you, Mr. Blair, who sings out ?"

"Kentledge, Kentledge, assist me, for Heaven's sake, if you can !" exclaimed Lennard, who with joy recognized the voice of the boatswain ; and immediately the brown, sunburned face and curly hair of that personage were visible at the edge of the cliff above, as he peered cautiously over, and evidently lay flat on his breast, to save himself from falling into the sea.

"I thought, sir, you had gone off in the boat with them Spanish warmint, and had left *me;* now I finds as we're both marooned together."

"How did you escape, Kit ?"

"I swam off when the cutter began to go to pieces, for I saw they were squabbling, knife in hand, about getting into the dingy."

"And I was knocked down and left on board by Trocadero to drown, while they shoved off. Where are the crew, and where is the young lady ?"

"All that is more than I can tell you, sir. I got a knock on the head as the waves cast me on the shore, and, feeling worn and sleepy, not having closed an eye for nearly thirty-six hours, I took a snooze up here on some soft grass, till the sunshine and your shouts awoke me ; and here I am !"

"Help me if you can, Kit, like a good fellow."

"That would I do readily if I had a few fathoms of line and a purchase-block ; but——"

"Have you a knife ?"

"Of course, sir, here is my jack-knife."

"Cut some of these trailers, and make a rope ; twist them up somehow ; and if you'll lend me a hand I'll risk the attempt to climb. I can but fall into the sea."

"Don't think o' that, sir ; it is swarming with white sharks ; and some nibbles they've had o' them Spaniards that went to leeward with the long boat, have whetted their appetites uncommon !"

Kentledge, like every seaman, was fertile in expedients. Near the brow of the rock grew a wild vine, which was

firmly rooted in the soil, and two of the long, tough green tendrils of this he spliced together, using his black silk necktie and the sleeves of his shirt as lashings, and this improvised rope he lowered over to Lennard, assuring him that the branches would never part, and that he must hold on fearlessly. The preparation of this means for relieving Lennard proved somewhat protracted, so noon was almost nigh ere it was finished. Then by clinging to it with his hands and pressing his knees against the face of the rock, which was some twenty feet in height, panting, yet fearing almost to breathe, lest the vine should part and precipitate him into the sea below, Lennard slowly and laboriously reached the grassy plateau, where the strong hands of Kit Kentledge grasped his, and he found himself in safety. He looked pale and haggard, and his eyes were wild and bloodshot. His lips were baked and cracked, and he presented a remarkable contrast to the more hardy Kit Kentledge, who after his past peril had slept soundly during the night, and now that day had come, was prepared to look about him, and to take with equal equanimity the best or the worst that fate had in store for him. Again Lennard repeated a question he had asked often and with irrepressible anxiety during the preparations for his release, whether Kentledge was certain that he had not seen or heard of Donna Dora or the boat's crew, but only to receive the same answer,—that he was in total ignorance of their movements, and had never left that part of the isle on which he landed, but now they should explore it together.

We have said that the scene of the *Gaviota's* wreck consisted of two islands; one was flat and fertile, the other high and rocky. Lennard and Kentledge were together on the latter, and a stripe of deep water lay between them and the former. The rocky island was almost circular, more than two miles in diameter; and Kentledge, who knew those seas well, averred them both to be called the Arenas.

"See, Mr. Blair—look there away to the nor'ard."

The smoke of a steamer was visibly rising above the horizon; but she was more than "hull down," for the long and vapoury streak from her funnel alone indicated her locality, and the two lonely men looked long and wistfully, till the thinnest traces of it melted away. Wild verdure covered the island, forming a thick and matted jungle that grew close even to the shore, along which they proceeded slowly and leisurely, being seriously impeded at every pace, sinking now mid-leg deep, and anon almost to the waist, among twisted trailers, decaying gourds, and giant leaves,

from under which the mosquitos and others insects rose in black and humming clouds, while the sun's rays became so overpowering, especially as they were both minus hats, that they had frequently to make long and breathless pauses in their progress. They found a spring gurgling deep under this luxuriant jungle, and the draughts it afforded were so cool and delicious that they returned to it again and again.

Slowly thus they made their way round a portion of the isle without seeing a trace of the wreck, or of their companions, and no sail was visible on the sea. They holloed singly and together, but no voice responded. The utmost silence reigned around them, and there was no sound in the air but the murmur of the surf, blending with the dreamy hum of insect life. Lennard began to fear that Trocadero had put off in the boat and left the spot for ever. In his impatience of this slow mode of literally tearing a passage for themselves round the shore of the isle, Lennard suggested that they should ascend its highest point, and take a more extended view around them ; so, making their way, but with still greater difficulty, for in some places they had to climb masses of jungle-covered rock, in others the branches of falling trees, yet growing in the earth and forming a kind of natural abatis, impeded them, they reached the apex of the highest cliff, and then saw below, the vast expanse of open sea, the whole of the isle, and the other, which we have just described as being so flat and green, with its clumps of cocoa and plantain trees. They also saw the deep blue water that lay between them and the figures of men moving about in the creek, where the boat had been beached by order of Trocadero.

"There they are, thank God !" cried Lennard.

"Yes, with the dingy high and dry on the sand ; a sign of their being in no hurry for sea," said Kentledge.

"But where may Dora be ?" thought Lennard, as they proceeded at once to make their way down and towards the nearest point, that they might hail the crew to launch the boat and bring them off. But, as before, so impeded was their progress—their feet being entangled like those of one oppressed by a nightmare--so weary and faint had Lennard become that night had well-nigh closed in ere they found themselves at the verge of the stripe of water separating the islands.

Their approach seemed to have been quite unperceived by the Spaniards, to whom the discovery of the banasta had proved a source of extreme gratification, and thus amid the songs and uproar of Miguel Galvez and his shipmates, the

shouts of Lennard, in Spanish, and the anathemas of Kentledge, in English, were unheeded and unnoticed, though they were only about a quarter of a mile distant. So evening deepened fast into a night of tropical splendour. The murmur of the sea came in soft and measured cadence to the ear, and the tints of its waters were varied in the moonlight. In one place the wavelets rose and fell like liquid gold, but when they broke over the reef, their white foam shone like silver, and where the ocean stretched away into the vastness of the Gulf, it was all of the deepest blue, reflecting the depth and brilliance of the starry sky.

Yonder—half a musket-shot distant—Lennard could see the red glare of a fire, which burned brightly, being fed by pieces of the wreck. Around it rang the choruses of the now drunken seamen in their orgie, and close by them, from time to time, a girl in the shortest of skirts danced the Mexican manolo. That she was Jacinta, the girl from Campeaché, neither Lennard nor Kentledge could doubt, but where was Donna Dora?

"These drunken madmen have evidently procured spirits from the wreck, and do not heed us, Kentledge," said Lennard.

"They're having a jolly spree, sir; but I have great fears for the young lady among that 'ere coloured lot. I never liked sailors with rings in their ears."

On hearing his own anxieties so palpably expressed, Lennard could no longer contain himself.

"You speak my very thoughts, Kentledge," said Lennard, impetuously; "I shall swim over, whatever the risk may be."

"So shall I, sir; we may bawl here all night till we're hoarse without being attended to, and if heard, perhaps they might only laugh at us, or swamp the boat if they tried to launch her."

"The water is full of sharks, Kentledge; let us not both cast away life. If I can get over I'll come back with the boat for you."

"The sharks will be all about the reef and the back-bone of the wreck; they'll find some attractions there, such as beef-tubs, bread-bags, and turtles, and perhaps the lubberly Jack-Spaniards as were washed over with the long-boat. Let us cross higher up—and here goes!"

Kentledge tightened by a hole or two the strap or belt which girt his loose and now somewhat tattered inexpressibles, prior to plunging in. The attempt was full of deadly peril; but what mattered that to Lennard, if Dora's safety required him to face it? Besides, to some natures, especially

to such a spirit as his, danger, action and fierce activity, at such a time were an escape—a welcome relief—from maddening thought. Poor Kit Kentledge, now that he had lost the papers which Captain Maynard was despatching to Tampico, had nothing in particular to save, but felt himself bound to follow Lennard, and rejoin the Spaniards, though he knew them to be a graceless set.

"If I fail in crossing, Kit,—if aught happens to me, and you escape, you'll stand by that Spanish girl while life lasts?" cried Lennard.

"With God's help I shall, sir!" replied Kentledge, as they selected a point distant from the scene of the wreck, and plunged in.

Though neither were quite fearless of the chances against them—of the sharks around, the surf between, and the slippery rocks opposite—they swam boldly and sturdily over, and landed without a scratch or bruise on the opposite island, where they grasped each other's hands in hearty congratulation, as they stood dripping on the shore.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"NEUSTRA SENORA DEL GUADALOUPE."

INFLAMED by the potent aguardiente, after hours of long fasting, the tipsy crew were now making such a noise—seeming to be engaged in an angry brawl or general *mêlée*—that Lennard and his companion found the necessity, unarmed as they were, of approaching with circumspection. They could perceive Miguel Galvez, the Yucataco, and four others quarrelling, and all having their knives drawn, as the blades glittered alternately in the red rays of the fire and the silver light of the moon, which cast the shadows of the group far along the white sand. Jacinta was regarding them with terror, shrinking in the background, with a pale face, and a hand upon her lips, as if to repress a rising shriek. Three of the party were absent; Donna Dora, Trocadero, and Saavedra! Where were they, and how situated, was the first thought of Lennard's heart. As he turned away, a nervous clutch was laid upon his arm.

"Señor Saavedra!" he exclaimed, on seeing the poor little man, whom he would scarcely have recognised but for his immense curled moustaches, so woebegone, so utterly miserable did he now seem, and so tattered in costume,—"where is she?—where is Donna Dora?"

"Yonder, señor—yonder; we may yet be in time to save her."

"Save her from what—the sea?"

"From one as pitiless—but, oh! señores——"

"Speak quickly!" cried Lennard furiously.

Agonized by thirst, and ashamed of his own weakness and terror, Saavedra could barely gasp—

"Trocadero, pistol in hand, warned me off to a distance, on pain of death——"

"And she is now with him—alone?" exclaimed Lennard, with a spasm of terror in his heart.

"Alone, señores, alone! I have neither strength nor weapon—*he* has both," replied Saavedra, wringing his hands. "Save her, if you can; she is the only daughter of a dear, dear friend—my little Dora Dominga!"

The voice of the Spaniard was very mournful, and Lennard felt at that moment that his care of and regard for his god-daughter covered a multitude of the annoyances to which he had subjected her lover.

"The scoundrel," said Lennard, in a low voice of concentrated passion. "I'll kill him, as I would a viper!"

"Now to have a shy at old Pumpbolt," added Kentledge, clenching his hands; while Lennard, arming himself with a billet of wood—some fragment of the wreck which lay near—hurried at once in the direction indicated by Saavedra—the trees near the rock; and the fact of his arrival at a critical time was put beyond all doubt by the pitiful supplications of the sinking girl for mercy; as for aid, she expected none. Just as she was about to kneel before the pitiless Trocadero, that personage was struck to the earth as if by a cannon ball, and Dora, with a strange cry, in which joy and terror mingled, fell into the arms of Lennard Blair. Then, after a time, as he raised her head and pressed her to his breast, assuring her that she was safe, and that he too was safe, thrilling indeed was the glance of her sweet dark eyes, and divine was the smile which spread over her minutely cut little face and sensitive mouth, when she became fully conscious of who was her protector. For a time their mutual expressions were all mere incoherence, while the practical Kit Kentledge, ignoring them, turned his attention to Trocadero, who lay snorting at their feet, with his dark and coarse face deluged in blood.

"He's a blowing like a sparmicitty, he is!" said the boatswain, as he quietly turned him over with his foot. "The old Spanish warmint, he should have gone from the yardarm to the devil long ere this time."

"He ought to be shot outright, like a wild beast," said Lennard, with a glow of returning anger.

"Not by you, sir, anyways," said Kentledge. "He ain't very moral, I've no doubt; but remember how much one's constitootion has to do with that commodity as the parsons calls morality," added this sea philosopher, as he kicked Trocadero over again on his back, and took from his sash a pair of pistols and a small bag of caps and ball-cartridges. "Now, old Mosquito, the sting is out of you, and here's to make you all fast and comfortable."

Then, trundling Trocadero out of the long worsted sash which girt his waist, Kentledge therewith made fast his arms behind, and left him thus to come to his senses at leisure. The dew found in the hollows of some large leaves, proved the means of assuaging the thirst of Dora and her two friends; a tortoise roasted by Kentledge in its shell, and one of Jacinta's ill-flavoured and indifferently toasted cakes formed a repast, over which they related all that had passed during the twenty-four hours' separation; and then they spoke of the chances of ultimate release. Amid this Jacinta came, in tears and terror, to announce that, in a fit of jealousy concerning her, the crew were slaughtering each other at the creek; and now she crouched down at Dora's feet, hiding her face in her skirts.

Leaving Dora with Saavedra and her attendant, Lennard and the boatswain hurried away, anxious to save human life if they could do so. But when they reached the creek, the bright light of the moon revealed a very startling spectacle. Two gachupins, or Mexican Spaniards, tall, sombre, and muscular men, with rings in their ears—one having his head girt by a gaudy handkerchief, while the other had his coal-black hair gathered in a red silk net—lay there dead, their broad, bare breasts gashed with several wounds, and their hands yet grasping those odious knives, which few seamen of any country are now without. One man lay partly in the water, which came rippling in silver wavelets on the white sand of the creek. Near the boat, the embers of the now neglected fire reddened and faded out, to redden again under the breath of the passing breeze; the empty banasta, the evil contents of which had brought these crimes about, the bones and shells of some roasted tortoises and other débris lay near, and snorting in their tipsy slumber, with visages pale, and lips parted and black, lay the four survivors of the crew of the *Gaviota*, on a bank which was covered by the blossoms of the sweet-pea growing wild.

"Take their knives away, Kit—from the dead as well as the living,—and cast them into the sea," said Lennard.

Kentledge speedily did so, and, leaving the four men to

sleep off the fumes of their orgie under the baleful tropical dew, Lennard and he returned to where Jacinta was once more making a species of bower for her mistress and herself of the great palm-leaves. On consciousness returning to Trocadero, he alternately uttered dreadful threats and pitiful entreaties to be released from his bonds; urging that, if they ever reached Vera Cruz, he would complain of his maltreatment to the Corregidor, and the Alcaldes Ordinarios; but Lennard bade the ruffian to remember how he had left him to perish on the wreck—how he had struck him twice with his pistol, and of his more recent insolence to Donna Dora, adding that he should be thankful that life was spared him. Then the baffled Trocadero howled like a wild animal, and gnashed his teeth in the impotence of his fury, but after a time he became silent and sullen, and betook him to brooding, no doubt, on some terrible vengeance.

While Dora and her attendant slept, Lennard and Kentledge, with Saavedra, sought a temporary shelter from the dew under the branches of a stunted plantain-tree, and conned wearily over their plans for the future—the probability of a vessel coming in sight, and the means for hailing or signalling her; how, if the boat were stocked with fruit, tortoises, and the banasta filled with pure water from the spring on the other isle, they might put to sea, and by constant rowing reach the coast of Yucatan. But they were without a compass, without sails or covering, and when Lennard thought of the delicate and gently nurtured Dora in an open boat upon the sea, with four of the crew such Spaniards as those of the *Gaviota*, he shuddered. And then there was Trebucio Trocadero; he could neither be taken on such a desperate expedition, nor left to perish alone on the island.

Lennard grew weary of sad conjectures, and, overcome by all he had undergone, dropped into slumber. How long it lasted he knew not; but he had many painful and uneasy dreams, with shadowy memories of the horrors he had endured in the coal-mine, blended with episodes of the wreck in chaotic confusion; and again he seemed to hear the voice of Hesbia Vere as in their last interview, and he felt his heart stirred painfully, though Hesbia was nothing to him now. A ship had come, he thought, and Dora was being borne off to her in the arms of Trocadero, whose dark face wore an expression of ferocious triumph. Imploring help, Dora's eyes, and face, and hands were all turned to Lennard, who sought in vain to follow her, for his limbs had become powerless, his feet seemed to adhere to the earth, to sink

deep in the sand or the masses of jungle that rose around him. It was hideous nightmare—he strove to cry out, but the sound died unuttered on his lips. The whole situation and scene seemed to be horribly and palpably before him—the vessel, a large steamer like the *Golden Dream*, lay with her broadside to the island; the blue waves were rolling in the sunlight around her; the smoke was pouring in black volume from her red funnel, and there was in his ear the fierce angry sound of the snow-white steam blowing off. He started up as the cheerful voice of Kit Kentledge broke the spell; but the sound was still in his drowsy ears, and there, beyond all doubt, within a quarter of a mile from the island, was a large screw-steamer—the vessel of his dream—lying to, with her mainsail thrown in the wind's eye, while one of her boats was being pulled fast inshore; for Kentledge, who had been on the look-out since early dawn, had, as she drew near, made such signals from an eminence as could not fail to attract the watch on deck—so they were all to be saved ere the more serious portion of their sufferings had begun. The vessel proved to be the *Neustra Señora del Guadaloupe*, from Cuba, bound to Tampico, *viâ* Vera Cruz; so in one hour from the time of his dream, Lennard had the joy of seeing Dora safe amid the comforts of the ladies' cabin, and Trocadero tied with a rope in the cable-tier below, there to remain until he was handed over to the Spanish authorities. Kit Kentledge would have liked a pot of beer after all his troubles, but was compelled to take rum-grog dashed with Angostura bitters, the rich pink colour of which he greatly admired. Saavedra solacing himself with a cigar on the poop, was again pulling his long moustaches, making the most of his little figure, and treating Lennard as before, with coolness and hauteur; but our hero cared little for either. He had been in time last night, after a great peril, to save her he loved, and who loved him dearly; and though another twenty-four hours might—as his heart foreboded—see them parted, perhaps for ever, the memory of all that had passed and of all they had endured together since the sailing of the *Golden Dream* would never be forgotten; and thus full of his own thoughts he watched the rocks of the Arenas fading into the yellow morning haze astern, while the large and stately Spanish vessel steamed on her western course—

> " O'er the deep, o'er the deep,
> Where the whale, and the shark, and the sword-fish sleep;
> Where outflying the mist and the driving rain,
> The petrel telleth her tale in vain."

CHAPTER LXIX.

SEPARATION.

NEXT morning beheld the mighty outline of Orizaba, a snow-capped volcano which is more than a thousand feet higher than the Peak of Teneriffe, rising from the sea, and ere long the lesser cone of Tuxtla, which is four miles from Vera Cruz, was seen to send its puffs of steam-like vapour into the cloudless sky. These and other peaks were visible long before the rest of the coast rose above the pale horizon.

"Ah, Orizaba once more, and the little Tuxtla, too!" exclaimed Donna Dora, with that joyous and hearty ring in her voice which was so attractive, and might make any man swear she was a true, brave, and loving girl; "I greet you again, my own dear hills!"

And playfully she kissed her pretty fingers to the distant mountain peaks.

"I know the very place where our villa looks down on the green savannah, but we are too far off yet to see even its woods and plantations."

"The outline of the land alone is visible, señora," said Saavedra, with a frown; "but with a powerful telescope one might perhaps make out the great mass of the castle of San Juan."

"In sight of home already, and at *this time* yesterday we were on that desert isle," said Dora, pursuing her own thoughts, as her eyes met those of Lennard in a mutual glance that conveyed a volume, for though she spoke much and in her quick and rapid little way was pointing out and describing the various features of her native coast as they increased in size and distinctness, he was somewhat silent and sad, in the fear that he was hearing her voice, so beloved, for the last time perhaps.

He had heard so much of the wealth of Donna Dora's father—a merchant prince in the land of gold and silver—that he could never hope, as the mere agent and junior partner of the house of Vere & Co., to be acceptable as a suitor; and then there were Spanish pride of race, difference of religion, and jealousy of strangers to be overcome. These prospects filled him with nervous fears and keen anxiety for the future. Plans he had none, beyond visions of hard work and energetic attempts to acquire the wealth he coveted, not for his own sake, but that he might feel more near and worthy of her he loved; yet this acquisition, if ever won, would require time—it might be years. So he was full of

thought, while the great steamer drew nearer and nearer the land of his destiny. Already its violet tints were changing to the greenery of verdure, and its features became more sharp and distinct against the deep and intense blue of the South American sky.

"We shall land this evening, I presume," said Dora, after a long pause.

"To-night," was the curt response of Saavedra.

"You must come immediately and see papa and me at our own home—perhaps he may take you there to-night," said she, with a sweet smile, "when he hears of all our adventures together, for I have no doubt he will come for me with the carriage personally."

"You forget, señora, that he expects you by the *Golden Dream* from England, *not* by the mail-steamer from Cuba," said Saavedra, coldly.

"Oh, true, amigo mio!—of what am I thinking?" said the girl, as her bright face clouded for a moment.

Lennard was regarding her tenderly, and was so full of her presence and of their approaching separation, that he scarcely ever looked at the land they were nearing. His love for Dora was not based on mere external attractions, though she possessed many; it was an emotion that had grown up rapidly in his heart—an instinct the result of tenderness on his part, of sense and sensibility on hers.

"It must have been passion I felt for the large and full-formed Hesbia; but it is love—pure and gentle love—I feel for Dora," thought he; for the fair-skinned and golden-haired Spanish girl, with her charming and quaint espièglerie of manner, realized all that he had ever dreamed of beauty in his moments of enthusiasm; and, though neither poet nor painter, he had not been without his day-dreams of a face to love: yet such a face, when found, exists too often in the fancy of the lover only. Had he never thought thus of another face? Perhaps. Yet Lennard Blair was blameless.

The sandy shore of Vera Cruz, the great castle of San Juan de Ulloa, the spires and domes of the churches, were all distinctly visible as the sun set in flame beyond the mighty mountain ranges that rise inland. But when the Cuban steamer, with slackened speed, in charge of a pilot and preceded by multitudes of silvery flying fish scared to leap high by the noise of the screw propeller, came into soundings, and slowly passing midway between the reefs of Blanquilla and Panjaros, was opposite the lighthouse and Fort Conception, darkness lay upon the scenery. The city,

its walls and redoubts, with the shipping in the bay of Vergara, were lost in obscurity, though a red flush to the westward still threw forward in dark and strong outline the peaks and ridges of the remoter sierras. The sky was without a cloud, and was becoming rapidly studded with silver stars that sparkled amid the blue and crimson. The land breeze was soft and pleasant, and below Point Hornos it came over the water laden as if with the odour of violets. Lights here and there shone from casements, and that of the pharos gleamed steadily across the waters of the bay. A confused crowd of many persons could be seen upon the pier or wharf as the steamer drew nearer. There were torches and lanterns, but no gas-lamps. The deep and sonorous shouts in Spanish came clearly over the water, as officials and porters hastened hither and thither jostling each other ; and strange uniforms were seen at times, with the glint of a bayonet, as a sentinel trod to and fro at his post.

Aware that their time for parting had come, when Donna Dora would inevitably be conveyed away by the jealous Saavedra, and when Lennard should have to seek for quarters at some vinta or hotel—friendless, alone, and a stranger in a land of strangers—they remained together hand in hand under the awning on deck, unheeded among the crowd of Cuban passengers, who with all their cloaks and mufflings, bag and baggage, were preparing to seize the first moment for escape from their watery prison. The lovers were totally unencumbered by luggage, as all they possessed was lying with the wreck of the *Gaviota*, and Lennard was so occupied with Dora that he never reflected how little he had in his purse, or on the difficulties he might experience in his dilapidated costume of proving his identity to his cautious business correspondents in Vera Cruz. A boat came off from the shore, and now the steamer was boarded by several officials, some of whom were in uniform. The lists of passengers in cabin and steerage were given, and of course mention was duly made, as recorded in the log, of the persons rescued from the island of the wreck ; and on the name of Trebucio Trocadero being given, he was ordered up from the cable-tier to be sent to prison ashore ; but, lo ! the place of that distinguished mariner was vacant, the cords which had bound him were found lying in fragments on the lower deck ; for he, assisted by some friend or confederate —by one of the crew of the *Gaviota*, most probably—had escaped by swimming ashore.

During the hubbub caused by this discovery, Lennard and Dora had retired to the now deserted cabin, where they were

sitting in silence, and almost in the dark, the thrifty steward having lit but one or two of the lamps. Her right hand and cheek rested on Lennard's shoulder; his left arm was round her caressingly, and her eyes were full of tears, when they were startled by the somewhat brusque entrance of a young man in the picturesque costume peculiar to Mexico; his jacket and breeches, theatrically termed slops, were of rich maroon-coloured velvet, slashed with white silk and braided with silver. He wore a large sombrero decorated with a broad scarlet ribbon, having a deep fringe, also of silver, resting on the left shoulder. In his silk sash of many colours were a knife with a carved ivory hilt, and a silver-mounted Colt's revolver pistol. After a hasty and imperious glance round the partially darkened cabin, he came at once forward to Dora, who, starting, held forth her hand, with a blush in which more of surprise than pleasure mingled.

"What is this I see, and what is this I hear!" he exclaimed; "my uncle Saavedra and Donna Isidora arriving by the mail steamer from Cuba?"

"Not from Cuba, Don Ignacio," replied Dora, as he lifted his velvet sombrero and kissed her hand; "but thereby hangs a long story."

Though not jealous by nature, Lennard felt a chill come over now, as if some evil influence was impending here.

"A story of a wreck, my uncle tells me," continued the young man, whose keen eyes were fixed with no pleasant expression on Lennard, for they were flashing as redly as the point of his cigar.

"A story nearly of *three* wrecks," said Saavedra, who had now joined them; "for the *Golden Dream* broken her starboard wheel in a pampero; then she sprung a leak off the coast of Yucatan, forcing her into Campeaché; and finally we were cast away among the Arenas."

"Why, señora," said the young Mexican, laughing, "your voyage home has been like that of the *Orinoco*, in which all who did not die became crazy.* And you liked England?"

"I adored it!"

"And surviving all, thank our Lady of Guadaloupe, we are now home again," said Saavedra.

"I give you welcome, Donna Dora. You left us but a child; now you are a woman, I dare not say how beautiful; but, after to-morrow, the sun will shine brighter in Vera Cruz."

"You do not speak of my father, amigo mio Ignacio; how is he?" said Dora, uneasily.

* Este es el viage del *Orinoco*. Que el que no se murio, se volvio loco.—*Spanish Proverb.*

"Well and strong."

"He has, then, recovered from the illness which made him hasten my return from Europe?"

"Perfectly, señora; but he is now absent with his Excellency the Governor, at the river of Xampa, and little anticipates the pleasure and surprise that await his return home."

"My beloved papa!"

"But pardon me, señora; *this* gentleman—you do not introduce us."

"Señor Lennard Blair, who saved my life at the Arenas, and to whom I, and your uncle Saavedra, owe a debt of gratitude," said Dora, with a blush and a glance at Lennard, in which the emotion she named was blended with one more tender.

"Yes; par Dios, we have truly been inseparable," was the dubious response of the elder Saavedra, curling up his moustaches, and bestowing a furtive glance upon his nephew, who, instead of bowing to Lennard, started on hearing his name, and gave him a very unmistakable stare, saying—

"Santos; what! you here again?"

"Señor?" queried Lennard.

"One might have thought the atmosphere of Vera Cruz too hot to suit you."

"I do not understand."

"We heard that you had gone to Cuba; but my meaning will shortly be explained."

"I shall tell you of all our adventures elsewhere," resumed Dora, hurriedly, and feeling alike perplexed and uncomfortable by this reception of Lennard by another of her father's friends, this nephew of Saavedra, a pale, unhealthy-looking, and green-skinned lithe and supple little gachupin or Mexican Spaniard, with deep bead-like black eyes, and slender moustaches which seemed, like those described by the late Albert Smith, to be merely eyebrows on the upper lip. Lennard was about to speak again, but after a whispered word or two apart with his uncle, the young man smiled to Dora, and went abruptly on deck.

"Señora," said Saavedra, "the steamer is now close alongside the pier; my nephew Ignacio will procure a carriage for us. Are you prepared to go?"

"Instantly," replied Dora, adjusting a bonnet and cloak with which a lady passenger had supplied her, and the jarring sounds alongside, the escape of the steam overhead, with the increased noise of feet on deck, all served to announce that *Neustra Señora del Guadalupe* was moored hard and fast by the quay at Vera Cruz.

"Follow us, señor," said Saavedra to Lennard, "and we shall see you to a hotel."

Lennard bowed, and muttered his thanks. Dora took the arm of her padrino, while Lennard followed, and by the light of torches and lanterns on the deck and quay, found himself gradually approaching the gangway by which he was to reach *terra firma*—to tread the soil of the New World—amid a crowd of motley-looking Mexicans, exhibiting every colour in costume and every hue of complexion, from the darkest type of Africa to the purest European. All had large hats, many of them being ornamented by gaudy ribbons and bead-rolls. Some were minus pantaloons, while others had on two pairs—the outer, of one colour, being slashed up the side, to show the inner, of another and a gayer tint. Some were splendidly dressed, like Don Ignacio, but many more were in rags; some wore gay striped mantles, others the Mexican *serapé*, a woollen blanket, having a hole for the head to pass through. Some wild-like figures wore the *tilma*, or Indian cloak, and many, particularly the stout negro porters, were naked to the waist; but the air around them all was redolent with tobacco.

After shaking hands with Kit Kentledge, and exchanging mutual assurances of meeting again, Lennard became conscious of having his progress from the ship impeded by two or three persons with whom Don Ignacio paused to converse, and who so systematically intruded themselves between him and those he wished to follow closely, that Dora and Saavedra had already crossed the gangway, and she was anxiously looking back, before Lennard had reached it. He had just done so by a rough effort in pushing one of those persons aside, and was about to say a few parting words of thanks, and farewell to the captain of the Cuban steamer, when a hand was laid heavily on his own, and turning, he found himself confronted, and his passage barred by a tall and sombre-looking man in military uniform, who said—

"Señor, I have business with you."

"Pardon me," replied Lennard; "I am in haste."

"Probably—but I am in none, and can share my leisure with you. Remove that gangway, Señor Capitano, and have this person conducted into the cabin. He is my prisoner."

"Prisoner!" echoed Lennard, confounded by this sudden and new position, and still more so, when he saw a Mexican soldier on each side of him, with shouldered musket and bayonet fixed. He heard the voice of Dora calling to him faintly amid all the hubbub this affair caused among the crowd upon the quay.

"Arrested—Lennard arrested—for what, and by whom?" she demanded, impetuously.

"Par Dios, I don't know; but I always thought him a rascal," replied old Saavedra, with glee, as he hurried her out of the gathering mob.

"Dear, dear Lennard—amigo mio—mi querido, this is all some cruel mistake, which papa—would that he were here—shall rectify to-morrow. Adieu for a little time." She wrung her hands, and wept, as she was almost thrust into a carriage by the two Saavedras and driven off; but not before she had heard the crowd uttering fierce execrations against the English prisoner.

"Lennard arrested!" she continued to repeat, for she was plunged in sorrow and perplexity. Not knowing what to think, she was stunned on hearing the charges which Ignacio Saavedra assured her were made truthfully against the culprit. He had committed various robberies on the highway, forgeries on the bank of Vera Cruz, and had assassinated a wealthy planter. His knife was in possession of the Corregidor, and had his name graven in full upon the handle.

"Dios no quiero that a false accusation should be made," said Señor José; "but he must have been in Mexico before. I suspected that he knew Spanish too well when we met on board the *Golden Dream*."

Dora was still inclined to have the carriage stopped, and some inquiries made, but a horrible lepero, with leering eyes and long lean fingers, ran to the window, crying—"Caridad, señorita! caridad, por el amor de la Santissima Virgen!"

So they were compelled to drive on.

"Happen what may, any way they are separated *now*," thought José Saavedra with a grin of satisfaction.

Meanwhile, how fared it with Lennard.

"This is some unaccountable mistake, señor," said he, smiling, but nevertheless excessively annoyed; "and it can, no doubt, be satisfactorily explained by you."

"By *you*, rather; par el Demonio, but we shall see!" replied the officer, who announced himself as Captain Salvador Gonzalez y Llano, of the National Guard, or militia of the province, and before whom Lennard found himself pushed back into the cabin, amid a crowd of wondering seamen and engineers, negro porters, cargadores, and idlers. "Listen—you speak Spanish I find?"

"Yes; but I am an Englishman."

"This document, which I have carried about me for a month, says otherwise," exclaimed the officer.

"How?"

"That you are a Scotsman."

"So I am, señor."

"Demonio, how can you be both? Come, señor, this is no place or time for trifling, and we have means of curing such insolence, both sharp and sure," said the Spaniard, angrily, as he glanced at a document which Lennard was surprised to see looked remarkably like a warrant—being a printed form, the blanks of which were filled in by writing, while an official seal was at the bottom. "Rogues have as many countries as names, and this duplicity but proves your character," added the captain, who was in a decidedly bad humour, his dinner of gaspachos—a mess of bread, vinegar, oil, sliced onions, and garlic—having seriously disagreed with him.

"I demand by what right you take me into custody, and detain me from my friends?" asked Lennard, now becoming angry.

"I arrest you, Lennard Blair, as a British subject——"

"On what charges?"

"Complicity in robbery, forgery, and murder—these are quite enough, I think."

"This is too absurd!"

"I hope you may find it so. These crimes were committed in the province of Vera Cruz, before your flight, and my present warrant is from Don Juan, the principal Alcalde Ordinario."

Matters were now looking decidedly serious!

"You dare not put this indignity upon me; I shall appeal for protection to the British Consul."

"He fully concurs in our desire that you should be arrested and punished for your crimes."

"I swear to you, señor, by all that's sacred, that I have not yet had my foot on South American soil! I have read and heard a good deal about Spanish injustice, corruption, and pig-headedness; but certainly never expected to experience any of them. However, señor, I shall not resist——"

"To do so would be worse than useless."

"I can only assure you that you are mistaken; that this is the most absurd accusation in the world, and that to-morrow, at latest, shall show you who I really am, when my papers——"

He paused with some confusion, remembering that all his business credentials and letters of credit was lost in the luckless *Gaviota;* and in this momentary bewilderment he was handcuffed—yea, literally and most securely handcuffed to a soldier—as an additional security.

"Cartucho en el canon, hombres" (load your arms), said Captain Salvador Gonzalez, on which the escort loaded and capped their rifles, and very dirty looking fellows they were, their garish and braided uniforms being like some of the "properties" of an itinerant theatre.

Lennard was then conducted on shore, and marched from the quay, through narrow, irregular, and ill-lighted streets, amid a motley and copper-coloured crowd of Mexicans, who heaped their most bitter reproaches on him as "matador y assassino;" and among them he thought he heard the voice of Trocadero.

"For Heaven's sake, señor, let us proceed quickly," said he to the officer, "that we may avoid this detestable rabble."

"You are in a hurry, hombre—the place we are bound for is not so pleasant after all."

"May I ask where you have orders to convey me?"

"Si, amigo mio," replied the officer, who thought little of a case of homicide more or less, "to the castle of San Juan de Ulloa."

CHAPTER LXX.

THE CASTLE OF SAN JUAN DE ULLOA.

WITH intense chagrin and annoyance, which afterwards grew to wild and vague uncertainty of purpose, he had walked between his escort to the point where a boat took them to the prison, and there he heard himself formally given over by the Captain Salvador Gonzalez, who received a receipt for him, and then bluntly withdrew, without a glance or a bow. Lennard's first thought was that the whole affair, if not a mistake which would be easily explained, was a trap, a device, or scheme resulting from the trickery of José Saavedra, of Trocadero, of Vere perhaps, or of all together; in short, he knew not what to think. His mind was a chaos, and he passed a night of sleepless misery, tormented by reflection and the mosquitos. He had been searched, and Trocadero's loaded pistols were found upon his person. In a country where all men go well armed this discovery excited no comment; they were quietly confiscated, and so were the contents of his purse, among the officials of the great government prison. He fully and fondly believed that the next morning would afford him some solution of the mystery; he did not undress, but lay on a couch, the appearance of which was very repugnant to him, and in a cell, the walls of which were built of that peculiar soft white stone of which the castle is composed—so soft, indeed, that cannon shot do not

splinter, but imbed themselves in it. A can of coffee and a slice of indifferent bread were given to him by a taciturn warder, from whom he could not extract a single word.

The first day in the castle of San Juan lagged slowly on; his simple dinner of plantains, beans, and garlic, with a jug of cold water was followed by another cup of coffee for supper; the night came on, and still he was a prisoner, unquestioned and unfettered, and the reason for the latter circumstance he discovered to be the vast strength and seclusion of the fortress, when, after enduring three days of mental torture and exasperation in his cell, he was permitted to take the air for two hours under sure guard on the ramparts, with the warning that if he attempted to leap over he should be shot; so that he was sure of death any way, as the walls are of enormous height.

The castle of San Juan de Ulloa is separated by several hundred yards of sea from the city, and occupies the rocky islet near which the gilded and high-pooped caravels of Hernan Cortez were moored, when on the Good Friday of 1519, he first discovered the great harbour that lay beyond, and in the pious spirit of his people and of the age, named the land La Vera Cruz; and on that rock the fortress was built, when, about sixty years after, Sir John Hawkins, Admiral of England, surprised in the haven twenty-five great ships of Spain, with a new viceroy and sixty tons of gold on board; but succeeded in carrying off only two galleons. Three hundred pieces of cannon, many of them being of polished brass, bristle round its walls, which vary in thickness from twelve to eighteen feet, and have their bases on the rock or in the sea. The entrances to this castle are labyrinths of high stone walls, cunningly devised passages, having ponderous gates and drawbridges, flights of steps and vault-like ascents, guarded at every turn by sentinels, and swept by brass cannon and mortars; and as the Mexicans are always smoking, these alleys are strewn with cigar-ends, sawdust, and sand.

Every way Lennard turned his eyes the round muzzles of cannon gaped at him, so that whole regiments might be swept away ere a passage was fought into the heart of the place; yet all its battlements seem to have been sorely battered and defaced by the bombarding of the French in 1829 and the Americans twenty years after. Blackened and reddened by age, it towers above the sea on one side and the flat of Gallega on the other—a marshy swamp, the very abode of the vomito and the grim fever-king, and which in the rainy season is haunted by alligators, some of them

seven or eight feet long, and strong enough to drag a bull under water. Though a necessity for escape or the idea of it never crossed the mind of Lennard Blair, who confidingly expected a very ample apology for his unseemly detention, he felt his heart sink, as he surveyed this strange and sea-girt castle, which, like a mighty loch, barred him in from the outer world; and lower sunk his spirit when he looked at the city of Vera Cruz opposite. Deathlike and gloomy it was in aspect, and surrounded in its immediate vicinity by shifting hillocks of red sand. Built like the castle, chiefly of coral dragged from the bed of the sea, its houses were all of the most sombre old Spanish or rather Moorish fashion, with deep shady balconies in front, dark arcades below, and flat roofs, over which rose the spires and domes of sixteen churches. High above all, in mid air, hovered dark clouds of sopilotes, or black vultures, wheeling in circles, till they settled on some carrion in the streets, or on a dead horse lying amid the mangles and brushwood of the Arroya Gavilan.

Could fortune or wealth be made in such a place, where silence seemed to reign, and grass grew in the streets? Gloomy though the city, the vessels in the Bay of Vergara were all decked with colours, and the bells were ringing joyously in all the churches the summons to morning mass, for this was Christmas-day, and he was spending it, a prisoner without a crime, in the castle of San Juan de Ulloa. After two hours on the parapets he was again locked up, his warders maintaining an inexorable silence worthy of those of the Bastille de St. Antoine; but at the prospect of three days more solitary confinement in a white cell, the walls of which were spotted by mosquitos and cockroaches, and by the hideous scratchings, names, dates, prayers, and imprecations of former occupants, with bad coffee for breakfast, boiled plantains, and pimentos for dinner, he became so exasperated that the bastonero threatened to put him in a dark place on a level with the sea, where there would be no light. So several days passed away; the time actually grew to be weeks, in which he lost all count of it, for as the bells chimed every morning for mass he knew not the seventh day from any other. He grew thin, pale, haggard, and hopeless; and perpetual exasperation at his lawless detention imparted a fierce and restless expression to his eyes; but one portion of the twenty-four hours alone soothed him. This was the short vesper-time, when the chimes of the bells in church and convent came floating over the water and upward to his little grated window, from whence he could see Vera Cruz sinking into obscurity. From its uncertain

shadows and broken masses of building a few lights would twinkle out, after the sun, with a fiery crimson glow, had set beyond those mountains which are but the declivity of the Cordilleras of Anahuac ; then black clouds would come slowly sailing over the crimson flush, and the monstrous sopilotes, gorged with carrion in the streets and marshes, would sit drowsily flapping their sable pinions on the prison wall above his head.

The few street cries that came upon the wind—those of the sellers of mats, of curd and honey-cakes, of tortillas, of the carbonero, or coalmen, and so forth—would gradually die away, and then all became still in Vera Cruz ; and when "the world was left to darkness" and to him, the breast of Lennard Blair swelled with many sad and bitter emotions, known alone to God and to himself. With a yearning heart and wistful eye he watched ships and steamers come and go in the Bay of Vergara, and once he saw a British ship of war, and then he almost shouted for succour, with tears that he could not repress. Long and eagerly his eyes followed her, as she steamed out of sight beyond Point Hornos, and he thought with pride of the limits assigned, by Tallyrand, to our empire, "wherever there was water for a British frigate ;" but what availed it him ? And when she disappeared, he vented his impotent wrath on the Queen's Consul and the Mexican authorities. He writhed in spirit, and deemed it hard indeed that he, a poor young fellow who had done no wrong and had harmed no one, should be thus the sport of an evil destiny. Nightly out of the darkness, as he lay sleepless on his pallet, he could see the face of Dora with all its purity of complexion and brilliance of eye, so sweet, so fond and frank, bordered by its wealth of golden hair, and his glowing fancy drew her smiles and all her varieties of expression with wonderful distinctness. Would he ever look upon that fair young face again ; or had she forgotten him, even as another had done ?

"Has she believed in this absurd—outrageous accusation against me—oh, surely not !" he would say fondly and trustingly ; "but I have been deceived once—why not again ?" he added, bitterly.

Hesbia Vere had shaken the foundations of faith in his heart, and the stab of her bestowing had left a scar there, which time would heal—had healed it, indeed—but years must needs pass ere it faded for ever away. Then rage against certain persons, some of whom were unknown, but chiefly against the two Saavedras, would swell up into his breast ; for he failed not to recall every instance of Señor

José's offensive bearing from the first time they had met so casually at the Preston Station—*now* it seemed as if years had passed since then—and the supercilious manner of his gaily-attired nephew, during that last eventful hour on board *Neustra Señora del Guadaloupe*.—Lennard's pale face looked paler than ever now, for dark and unhealthy circles surrounded his eyes, and his features had become pinched and drawn from sleeplessness and over-thought.

He sought advice of the chaplain of the fortress—a Franciscan friar, a mild and pleasing old gentleman, who though he gave Lennard from time to time a few cigars as a little bit of human charity, evidently regarded him with more disgust than commiseration, and could only shrug his shoulders, clasp his hands, and turn up his eyes in reply to the prisoner's assertions of his total innocence of any crimes, and the impossibility of his having committed them, being, at the time stated, far away upon the sea.

"Hijo mio, a writer has said that 'even the quietest life reeks with the devil's whispering;' if so, why not yours—thus it may be all very true what you say," the friar would reply.

"Will you, Señor Padre, kindly convey for me a letter to a gentleman of Vera Cruz?" asked Lennard.

"Most willingly I shall, with the permission of the governor," replied the Franciscan blandly.

"Oh, how can I sufficiently thank you!"

"I require no thanks; but to whom do you wish your letter given?"

"To the father of a lady whom I befriended—whom I saved indeed from great peril after our shipwreck."

"His name, hijo mio?"

"Señor Dominga."

The friar thought for a time, playing the while with the knotted cord that girt his flowing robe, and then he said,—"There is no such name in all Vera Cruz—of that I am assured."

"Ah, do not say so," urged Lennard.

"I do—it is impossible."

"Why, padre?"

"Because Dominga is a woman's name; if spelt with an *o*, it is a man's. There is some confusion here, my son."

"Dora Dominga," thought Lennard in his own heart, with a sinking there; "can it be that I have never learned her correct surname. But the list of the steamer's passengers must be procurable somehow, though not by *me*. Do you know Señor José Saavedra?" he asked.

"By name and sight I do; one of our richest merchants and a kind patron of our convent—a sharp-visaged little man, with large moustaches."

"The same! To him then will I appeal. He cannot be so heartless as to leave me here untried and forgotten; and there also is Don Juan Leonardo, with whom I have so often corresponded concerning Vere and Co."

"Write then, hijo mio, and if the Señor Gobernador permits me, I shall be happy to undertake the safe delivery of your letter."

Lennard did so, on the kind friar giving him materials. He wrote to Senor Saavedra, imploring him by the memory of their past adventures together, by his own knowledge that it was utterly and physically impossible that he, Lennard Blair, could have broken the laws of Mexico, to procure his release. He wrote in the same spirit to their mercantile correspondents, Leonardo and Co., announcing the business reasons for his visit to Vera Cruz, and the dangerous predicament, to save him from which he craved their influence; and these missives he gave to the friar, with something of hope glowing in his heart again. But many weary days passed on. The padre asserted that he had delivered the letters personally to the gentlemen to whom they were addressed; but no answer ever came to either, and the soul of the captive, who was now haggard and almost in rags, began to sicken within him, till he hoped that the yellow fever, which is the scourge of Vera Cruz, and invariably attacks all Europeans, would some day carry him off, and find him a grave, even where the bones of many a poor "heretic" lie, in the unconsecrated swamp of Gallega.

"I have been deceived and abandoned by those in whom I trusted," he exclaimed with intense bitterness; "Well—I suppose such things have always been since ships have sailed and winds have blown, and since men and women have loved and parted!"

Then would a gasping sob escape him—a sob to the memory of all that seemed gone for ever, and the desire to be at rest. Why live if trust were dead and love lost? Of his imprisonment and danger, and the temporary—he could scarcely deem it permanent—destruction of all the prospects and intentions which had brought him to Vera Cruz, he thought infinitely less than the suspense concerning his abandonment by Dora. Doubts of her were so many stings of mental agony, and perhaps the certainty that she had ceased to love, or had learned to blush for him, would have been preferable to the horrible uncertainty he endured,

The villainous prisoners with whom he was periodically brought into contact—half-castes of all colours—steeped to the lips in every variety of crime and atrocity, caused him to shudder, and his too evident repugnance excited their hatred and amusement.

"Poor fellow," said one in mock commiseration; "so you are weary of our pretty castle of San Juan de Ulloa?"

"More than tongue could tell you!"

"Then, if you would escape, get a rope with a light loop, and take a long leap over the wall."

"I have no desire to die by my own hand."

"Diabolo," said the convict with a grin, which made his white teeth glisten under his coal-black moustache; "'tis better than dying slowly by the iron collar and screw."

"The garotte, hombre, which we all know awaits you, if you escape dragging a chain in the mines of San Luiz de Potosi," added another.

Lennard could only respond by an angry sigh to the mocking laugh of the gachupin, whose crime had merely been the burning of a rancho, or farm-house, with all its inmates, to conceal a prior robbery. The last months Lennard had spent at Blairavon and Oakwoodlee; memories of the varied tints of the glorious Scottish hills and woods in autumn; the fields of West Lothian, which had been covered with golden grain, that bent like billows before the gentle wind, studded with the blue cornflowers and scarlet poppies; of the grey old church, whose solemn shadow fell on the graves of his father and mother; the quaint ancestral château of the Stuart days, with its slated turrets and gilded vanes; the faces of Steinie Hislop and of Elsie, who would have died for him; of kind Frank Feverley, the hard-worked village doctor; of his own luckless love affair with Hesbia, and all the troubles in which it had involved him; his sweeter and serener time with Donna Dora on the long voyage out; the terrors of their adventure on the isle; their brief separation and re-union there,—all seemed shadowy phantoms now, or fragments of an existence, long, long past. Three months glided drearily away.

The rain had fallen in torrents, covering the swamp of Gallega with water, amid the mud and ooze of which the huge alligators squatted and waddled to and fro. The miasma around the castle of San Juan was frightful, and the terrible vomito (or yellow fever) began to make its appearance among the prisoners and creole soldiers of the garrison, while the black sopilotes, like the harbingers of death, gathered thick as mosquitoes about the lofty walls

and gun-batteries. Reckless of the future, Lennard felt fearless of the grim disease.

"Destiny! who can change, avoid, or avert it?" he exclaimed, in his solitude, as the gloomy horror of fatalism settled over him. "I was weak enough, and superstitious enough, to believe in the virtue of the old Charter Stone, and that its retention as my own would bring back fortune to the old house—now—*now!*"

He ended in a peal of bitter laughter, the strange sound of which appalled himself, and made him grow grave and sad.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE VILLA LEONARDO.

THE same evening in which our hero abandoned himself to this mood of despondency, or despair, was that appointed for a fête at the villa of Don Juan Leonardo, the wealthy planter and merchant—the same Alcalde-Ordinario by whose warrant Lennard Blair had been committed a prisoner to the great carcel.

Situated a few miles westward of Vera Cruz, it stood—we should rather say it stands—in a beautiful and fertile district, where forests of banana, the pine, and oak mingle their foliage, branch over branch, in the most intricate of weaving and twisting, and where, through an occasional patch of blue, the light reaches the rank vegetation of months about their roots below. There, too, grow the trees whose odoriferous root is used for perfuming chocolate; and there, in the rocky and humid ravines which lead towards the Cordilleras, are the myrtle, the tobacco plant, and sarsaparilla growing wild.

The villa was so loftily situated that the temperature was delicious; Vera Cruz, the ship-studded bay, and gigantic castle were visible, but at a distance and seemingly far down below, while about two miles to the southward rose the volcano of Tuxtli.

Don Juan's residence was built in the form of a square, after the fashion of such houses in Mexico. Entering the court, around which opened the bath-rooms, kitchens, and apartments of the white and coloured servants, a magnificent staircase led to the sala, a lofty hall floored with marble, ceiled with snow-white stucco, elaborately gilded, and draped with white muslin and blue silk fringed with silver, though the walls were papered with blue and gold. The chairs,

cane sofas, divans, and chaises-longues all being cushioned with blue satin, tasselled and corded with silver. The blossoms and perfume of a thousand orchards, orange-groves, and flower-gardens were loading the soft night air with voluptuous fragrance, that stole through the tall and open windows of this magnificent sala, to mingle with the sweet odours emitted by bouquets, pastilles, and the scented waters of a white marble fountain, that spouted from shells upheld by Tritons of Venetian bronze, and sparkled and plashed in the vestibule, where the dancers or promenaders from time to time dipped their handkerchiefs in it.

This night was the fête of Donna Dora—the daughter of Don Juan Leonardo, for—no longer to keep the reader in the dark—such she was: a fête long postponed by an illness she had endured, but now given in honour of her recovery and return home; and, strange as it may appear, amid all their love-making, Lennard had learned only her Christian names, Isidora Dominga, and hence a great mistake and mystery on his part.

The joy of a reunion with her father had been sorely embittered by the cloud which hung over Lennard's arrest and detention, she could not precisely learn where, save that it was certainly in some secure prison—neither could she learn precisely for what, though her waiting-maid, Mencia, was one of the greatest gossips in Vera Cruz. She feared to express too much interest in his fate, even to her father, whom Saavedra had bitterly prejudiced against Lennard, whom he believed—for, in reality, Don Juan inquired little into the affair—to have come, not from England by the steamer, but from Cuba, or to have been one of the crew of the suspicious *Gaviota*. In short, the Mexican merchant, for reasons in connection with Vere and Co., and shortly to be explained, cared very little on the subject.

Loving Lennard in her heart most dearly, Dora fancied that every one she met must read the secret in her face; and so they might, had they observed narrowly how her colour came and went when his name was mentioned, which was but seldom, and only when the Saavedras were present, the real cause of his long detention being the want of certain witnesses who were necessary for his conviction of the crimes imputed to him.

Poor little Dora did not understand it all very clearly; she only knew that, unless Lennard had been in Mexico *before* they met in England and on board the *Golden Dream* (a circumstance to which he never alluded), he must of ne-

cessity be perfectly innocent of all alleged against him. The helpless prisoner was her plighted love; honour required that she should seek him out and defend him so far as lay in her power; but she was kept in total ignorance of much relating to his situation, and maidenly modesty—more than all, the strict and jealous reserve imparted by old Spanish manners, and the helpless and negative position of an unmarried girl—made her very silent on the subject, as she trembled for the influence of José Saavedra on her father, and for all that he might reveal. This struggle within herself—this mental torture and anxiety—together with what she had undergone on board the *Gavota*, the wreck and the subsequent exposure on the island, induced a serious illness under which she had laboured long, and thus her fête had been delayed for nearly three months.

Countless lights of perfumed wax made the villa brilliant, and as the rooms began to fill with company, Dora resolving to be almost the last to appear, lingered long in her dressing-closet, seated before her tall cheval glass, dreamingly submitting to the manipulation and dressing of her masses of golden hair by a Spanish creole girl—hair so long that it reached in silky ripples to her knee.

To her father she was gentle, tender, and dutiful as ever; but to others Donna Dora was changed in mood and temper, and when he detected this he simply conceived it to be the result of her three years' residence in England under the control of governesses. Her sweet and tender tone, her coaxing ways were gone, and her graceful impetuosity of manner had degenerated into mere girlish petulance. There were times when she was careless and heedless of all and of everything, and such was her mood to-night. From a casual remark dropped jestingly by Ignacio Saavedra she had learned that Lennard Blair was a prisoner in the castle of San Juan, between yonder horrid swamps and the sea. She had no longer his ring on her finger: in the present terrible state of affairs—doubt she had none of Lennard, and if she had, Dora would have loved him still—she dreaded her father's questioning and the sharp eyes of the Saavedras, elder and younger; so for a time the quaint old signet of Richard Blair—almost his son's only heritage now—was consigned to the secret drawer of her jewel-case.

Dora knew well that if it were seen now by Señor José or Don Ignacio (he was so styled in right of his mother, who was a lady of noble birth) they would take her to task for wearing the ring of the assassin and ladrone who was awaiting his trial in San Juan, and she hated both in her heart.

José Saavedra was well aware that she had worn such a ring since that eventful time in the *Golden Dream;* he chose now to commit the knowledge to silence, supposing that she had cast it away in shame of the donor. But how little he knew of his god-daughter Isidora Leonardo! Her piano—one of Broadwood's best—she had never opened, save once in an attempt to accompany herself to a verse or two of that song which first lured Lennard to her side, and the despairing lines of Pedro Padilla seemed so suited to her own case that the young girl burst into tears and closed the instrument. She was pale as marble now, for all the richness of her colour had fled. Her eyes looked unusually large and dark, and her minute and finely-cut little mouth unnaturally crimson. But these were the results of her recent fever and her present agitation of mind.

"Mencia," she asked impatiently, "are you nearly done with my hair?"

"Yes, señora, in another minute."

"I would rather have it cut off than be worried thus."

"I am making all haste, for the company are already beginning to arrive. Señor Saavedra and his nephew are already below."

"Of course," said Dora, shrugging her white shoulders and angrily opening and shutting a magnificent fan, the mother-of-pearl sticks of which were studded with turquoises; "it is ever so—the stupid and the least wanted always arrive first, and are the last to depart."

"The music is not yet begun, señora; but remember that you are engaged for the first waltz to Don Ignacio—and the first manolo too."

"He told you so?" said Dora sharply.

"Si, Señora, when he gave me that lovely bouquet for you."

"Where is it?"

"On yonder console."

"Throw it out into the balcony——"

"But bouquetier, señora?" urged the abigail.

"Throw it out too," said the petulant little beauty. "The first waltz! The moon must have been waning when he said this."

"Likely enough, señora—but when is *his* moon ever on the wane?" said the girl, catching something of her mistress's humour.

"You forget, Mencia, that Don Ignacio is my father's friend."

"And the señora's devoted but unacceptable servant," said Mencia, laughing.

"I have other things to think of than his attentions, Mencia," said Dora dreamily, and then she added, with a burst of emotion, "Oh, God help those anxious folks who are perpetually living in the past rather than the present, and, worst of all, the future, and who, like me, anticipate sorrow and evil ere they come!"

"Such should be the fate of the poor, the old, the bereaved, and unhappy; not of the rich, the beautiful, and envied, like one who owns all this golden hair and those magnificent diamonds," said Mencia, who was a dark type of the Spanish girl, and by contrast made her mistress seem more brilliantly white and fair. "With a few of those braids and brilliants I should have a dozen lovers at my feet. I have been wearying for a flirtation ever since Captain Gonzalez y Llano's company marched against the brigands in the Barancas, and pretty girls, like sweet grapes, will not keep for ever."

"Mencia, how your tongue runs on!"

"Pardon, señora," said the girl, who was everyway pretty, piquante, and smart, as she clasped a magnificent necklace of turquoises and brilliants round the slender neck of Donna Dora.

"Well, Mencia, I have heard that the brigands have been overcome, and Salvador Gonzalez's company are returning to Vera Cruz—indeed, we expect him here to-night."

"Señora, your toilette is now complete."

"Thank you, Mencia; then I must go. But, oh," added Dora mentally, "pining as I do for one whom I dare not openly love, and on whose frank, honest face I may never look again, how can I face all that glare and glitter—that crowd of stupid people down stairs!"

She said the last words half aloud, for Mencia observed,—

"We have not a moment to lose in meeting them. Don Juan has thrice sent his valet to ask when you will be ready to receive the guests, who are pouring hither in honour of your fête."

"Would that I had gone to my aunt at the convent!" said Dora wearily, as she rose and shook out her dress, which was in the most fashionable Mexican mode, being of white satin, with robe and mantilla over it, both of white blonde, with short sleeves and a low-cut bosom. Her entire suite of jewels consisted of diamonds and turquoises, and very lovely the pale girl looked, exciting a buzz of admiration as she entered the already crowded sala, and, concealing the canker in her heart, passed through the brilliant throng (where the display of bright-coloured satins and velvets, of blondes and brilliants, was wonderfully lavish) with a word and a smile

for all, and using her fan the while as only a Spanish girl can handle it.

Her father, Don Juan, whom we shall describe more particularly in a subsequent chapter—a grave and somewhat sombre man—surveyed her with a smile of pride and affection, glad alike of her recovery and the admiration she excited; for she was—as he was fond of calling her—his "one ewe lamb," being the last survivor of his little flock, all of whom had perished of the yellow fever, which is the peculiar scourge and terror of Vera Cruz.

CHAPTER LXXII.

DORA'S FETE.

THE band of a militia regiment was performing a species of overture while the company assembled, and the increasing glitter of gems, the display of gold lace on uniforms, and on the picturesque but somewhat fantastic attire of the gentlemen, the gorgeous liveries of the servants, who in baskets and on trays of silver bore about bouquets and ices, made the whole sala a scene of wonderful brilliance.

The dresses of the ladies were beautiful in colour and mode, and many were the superb Spanish eyes, the beautiful hands, and snowy arms and busts which were there—models perfect for a sculptor's eye; but none were equal to Dora—at least, so thought Don Ignacio, who, considering himself as somewhat of a privileged person — assuming, in fact, all the bearing of an accepted suitor—offered her his hand for the first waltz.

On this night Don Ignacio wore a costume which would have put to shame the funereal full dress of a European. In fashion it was not unlike that of Figaro in *Il Barbiere*, and quite eclipsed even the uniforms of the Mexican Lancers, who were arriving fast, and doffing their yellow serapes and high-plumed helmets in the vestibule. His jacket and pantaloons were of rose-coloured velvet, slashed with white silk, and elaborately braided and fringed with silver, particularly at the sleeves and shoulders; his vest was of white satin, and every button was a cluster of brilliants. He wore rings above his white kid gloves; and so careful had been his toilette that he almost looked well, though his complexion was somewhat green, his moustaches the most meagre, and his eyes small, beady, and in expression wicked.

"You have not my bouquet, señora," said he with an air

of undisguised pique; "yet I gave it to your maid Mencia —whom, when I look on you, I may well term your camarista mayor," he added, with his most insinuating smile.

"I forgot it—left it in my room, in fact, señor," said Dora, pouting, and in no way mollified by Don Ignacio's compliment in royally styling Mencia her mistress of the robes.

"An error easily repaired; a servant, if you will permit me—"

"Oh, pray, no!—bouquets always give me a headache, and there is quite perfume enough around us."

Don Ignacio bit his lips, and would have eyed her malevolently had he dared; but a crash of music from the gallery announced the first bars of the waltz. His arm stole round her waist, and in another moment they were mingling in the glittering maze of couples that swept almost noiselessly over the polished marble floor.

Dora's card had been instantly filled, so another and another came to claim her hand; especially after the arrival of the Governor and his aides-de-camp, whose showy uniforms were literally covered with gold lace, and whose bullion epaulettes were of the most colossal dimensions.

Amid all the gaiety of her fête and the attentions of which she was the centre, as the beautiful heiress of one of the wealthiest men in Vera Cruz—amid all the compliments so softly paid her in her sonorous native language, often by handsome and picturesque fellows—amid all the strange questions asked her concerning Europe and the Inglesos, her voyage and adventures—her thoughts were ever wandering to the prison of San Juan, and one who was lingering there, till the force of contrast between their relative positions made her feel wretched indeed. Yet, to please her father, to do honour to those who sought to do honour unto her—she made a great effort to appear gay amid the gayest, and to converse on the current topics—the last new fashion of everything; of music and pictures; of the coming bull-fight; of the promenades in the Alameda, where her English training made her wish to go afoot, to the astonishment of the Mexican donnas, who through "a mixture of aristocracy and indolence," are never seen there save in carriages; of the new company of comicos at the theatre; of the benefit-night of the great prima donna from Madrid; of her excelling in "Segunda Donna Duenda;" and how the beautiful corps-de-ballet shone in "Jota Arragonesa," to the great delight of José Saavedra and other gentlemen from old Spain.

Yet to Dora, who had been three years in Europe, it had

seemed odd that in the great theatre of Vera Cruz, when the silk-draperied grand tier was full of splendidly-dressed women, the male occupants of boxes, pit, and gallery were all smoking assiduously, and that even the prompter at the wing regaled himself with a huge diabolo marino, the smoke of which curled forth between the mimic rocks and trees of the side scenes.

Captured once more by Don Ignacio, flushed with repeated dancing, wearied—worried is perhaps the more proper word—by the systematic attentions of that young gentleman, Dora begged to be excused dancing again, and was led by him into the cool vestibule, where the bronze and marble fountain was plashing its perfumed water, and where the servants were distributing ices—a rare luxury in a climate so warm.

Seating herself on an ottoman near other ladies, that she might avoid any private remarks specially addressed to her, Dora, while fanning her flushed face, half turned a charming white shoulder to her admirer, as she knew but too well that it was for this very nephew that José Saavedra wished to secure her hand—views which Don Ignacio was quite disposed to forward so far as himself was concerned; and to which her own father was not averse, though he had frequently waived the subject by saying that he did not think his daughter old enough to marry yet.

Some of her admirer's vapid and commonplace remarks were now interrupted by the jingling of a pair of spurs—enormous Mexican spurs, having rowels like those worn by the knights of Bannockburn or Cressi; and, throwing aside a scarlet serape, the tall and sombre officer, Don Salvador Gonzalez y Llano approached and kissed her hand with great grace and courtesy. He was a gentleman of the first position in the province, and was lineally descended from that Pedro de Alvarado who, on the memorable retreat of the *Noche Triste*—the 1st of July, 1520—covered the rear of the fugitive Spaniards, and using his lance as a vaulting-pole, made that wonderful leap over the ditch which still bears his name.

"I rejoice, señora, to see you restored to health, and looking so well," said the captain.

"I thank you, Don Salvador; you have, I believe, just arrived from the mountains?"

"We marched in this afternoon; but I still leave my lieutenant with twenty men in pursuit of some outlaws on the old Indian road, towards Cordilleras—undoubtedly a portion of the band with which this pitiful picaro, Lennard Blair, connected himself."

Dora changed colour painfully at this name. The flush caused by the dancing soon passed away; no marble could be paler than her cheek, and Ignacio, who had all the sudden and serpent-like jealousy of the Spanish nature, saw the alteration with secret rage. Her whitened lips had not the power of questioning further, so he took up the thread of the conversation, to which all who were present listened with interest.

"Ah—then if your lieutenant is successful, we may succeed in obtaining the required proofs against this English criminal?"

"Exactly; the band have scattered and separated among the Barancas for safety, but all shall be cut off in detail. From the measures we have taken, it is impossible for one to escape," replied the officer, confidently, as he smoothed his long black moustache, and looking like what he was—every inch a soldier.

"I congratulate you, Salvador, amigo mio," said Don Juan, now coming forward, his tall and handsome, though thin, figure, appearing to great advantage in a dress of plain black cloth, but cut in the Mexican fashion, and only relieved by its bright steel buttons, and the whiteness of his cambric shirt and frills.

"I surrounded the main body of this gang of ladrones in a cane-brake, which we set on fire to windward, and from the leeward—if a soldier may use sea terms—we opened a fusilade at one hundred and fifty paces, hoping to destroy them all; but some broke through us and fled, half scorched, and wholly despairing. Among others was Trebucio Trocadero, the notorious wrecker and coolie crimp, who escaped from the Cuban steamer; but he has two bullets from my revolver in his body. These fugitives must soon be overtaken, and they are certainly the last of those men who leagued with this Lennard Blair in robbing the mails on the roads to Xalappa and Tampico."

"Lennard Blair again!" thought Dora; "what madness—what mystery can lie under all this!"

And she began to deem herself veritably a little coward for fearing to speak in defence of her lover, as José Saavedra had led Don Juan and many others to believe, what all in Vera Cruz had been given to understand, that the culprit taken on board the *Neustra Señora del Guadaloupe*, had *returned* from Cuba, and was not what he asserted himself to be—a passenger from England by the *Golden Dream*.

"A few days ago I had a letter from the rascal," said Don Juan; "it was written in very tolerable Spanish, and boldly

urged alike his innocence, and an immediate trial. He even threatened me, as Alcalde Ordinario, with the British Government."

"Daring rogue!" said José Saavedra.

"Keeping him in San Juan is simply feeding up a wretch who ought to be garotted in the Plaza," added his nephew.

"Proofs once found, no time shall be lost," said Leonardo, who in consequence of the very slight inquiries he had made personally into the history of the stranger arrested, on his own warrant, too—owing also to the studious misrepresentations of the two Saavedras—and perhaps more than all owing to certain circumstances connected with Vere & Co. (to be explained in due time) Don Juan Leonardo was exasperated against Lennard, and could not hear his name mentioned without emotion or rage. "You know, gentlemen," he resumed, "to what an amount he forged bills upon me, after having drawn out every peseta that was due to Vere & Co. of Liverpool; how he forged on the bank of Vera Cruz, and after gambling like a madman, joined some of those reckless spirits who had been ruined at the faro tables, and then began those outrages on the highway, which ended in the last mail robbery so fatally, and after which it was said he had fled to Cuba."

"Madre de Dios—Donna Dora has fainted!" exclaimed the officer, as a gasping cry escaped her, and she fell back insensible on the blue satin ottoman, over which her golden hair fell in a shower, and then all became confusion and dismay around her.

"My dear child—the heat and the over-exertion of to-night have proved too much for her!" exclaimed Leonardo, in great excitement, as he raised her in his arms, and bore her into the cooler atmosphere of the broad verandah which encircled the villa; and then Ignacio and Mencia, with handkerchiefs freshly dipped in the fountain, freely bathed her face, neck, and hands. The use of fans, and the pleasant breeze that came from the woods and from the sea, which glittered like silver in the moonlight, soon combined to revive her.

"God be thanked, she is recovering!" said Don Juan, in a low and earnest voice, as she opened her eyes, respired, and as consciousness returned made a painful effort to recover herself and stand erect; but had to recline in a drooping posture against the rail of the verandah.

"I have done wrong in having this fête so early," said Don Juan; "she has not sufficiently recovered her strength. Dora, darling, I have had letters from your aunt at the

Guadaloupe convent, wishing much to see you; and to her, if well enough, you shall go to-morrow for a time. Change of scene, of air, and more than all, the quiet of the convent, will alike conduce to your recovery."

"Thank you, dear papa. I shall be most happy to go."

"The carriage and an escort furnished by Salvador Gonzalez, shall set out with you after breakfast; and Ignacio Saavedra will ride by the window."

"Very well, papa—anything to please you, I shall do willingly, and I do so long to see my aunt, and ask her advice on certain matters," she replied, meekly, as she added, "make my excuses with a kind good night to all," and retired, leaning on the arm of Mencia, while many of the Mexican cavaliers and officers bowed their heads and drained their glasses of champagne, while shouting as she passed from amid them,—

"Viva! a la salud de neustra patrona Donna Isidora!"

"Of what the deuce were we talking?" said the officer from the mountains. "I hope I said nothing to frighten or excite her, in detailing the slaughter of a few picaroons and ragamuffins!"

"It is to that very subject, and to the English prisoner in San Juan, we must attribute the whole affair," said Don Ignacio.

"How so, señor?" asked Leonardo, sharply.

"Sooth to say, señor, whenever the fellow's name is mentioned she betrays the most painful emotion—the result, probably, of their short voyage together," added Ignacio, whose jealous exasperation was at fever-heat.

"Indeed!" said Don Juan, with deeply knitted brows and a threatening aspect, particularly grateful to the Saavedras; "then, proofs or no proofs, I shall have this Englishman rigidly questioned on the morrow!"

CHAPTER LXXIII.

EL CASA DEL AYUNTAMIENTO.

About the same time when Don Juan's handsome and well-hung London-made carriage, drawn by two white horses with driver and servants in crimson and gold livery in true Mexican taste—and with Don Ignacio in a dress covered with embroidery, a diamond-handled switch in his hand, and his huge stirrups of silver, caracoling by the window through which he sought in vain to catch a glimpse of Dora—left Vera Cruz, escorted by a corporal's guard of lancers

in their yellow serapes and glittering helmets, a boat with soldiers and a prisoner in it, was rowed across the little strait which separates the castle of San Juan from the city.

The soldiers in the boat were four in number, and had their bayonets fixed, for the prisoner was Lennard Blair on his way to a first examination before the alcalde, by whose warrant he had been arrested.

Dora saw not the boat, nor even the Bay of Vergara, as her route lay in an opposite direction; Ignacio Saavedra failed to obtain the least sign of her presence within the recesses of the handsome carriage, as she studiously kept the glasses up and had but one feeling—a longing to cast herself upon the bosom of her aunt, her mother's only sister, to tell the story of her love for one she dared not name and to obtain advice, for she had less fear of imparting the secret to the recluse than to her father who doted on her. Poor Lennard inhaled the free sea-breeze of the open bay with intense satisfaction. He had now been for three months in the great fortress, the looming mass of which lessened and dwindled as the distance increased between it and the boat; and in loathing he turned his back upon it.

He looked forward confidently to release, and even to apologies for his illegal detention on charges so outrageous, as the immediate result of his trial, examination, or whatever tribunal he was now about to face, forgetting that he was in a land where all the forms of law and order are crude, strange, and undefined.

Having grown heedless of everything, almost of life itself, during his weary captivity, Lennard had permitted his hair, beard and moustache, to grow uncut and untrimmed; so his appearance, especially in his extremely dilapidated costume, was certainly wild and odd enough.

Odd, too, were the sights that awaited him in Vera Cruz, such as the costume of the alguazils (or constables) to whom the soldiers consigned him, and who wore broad sombreros, vandyke collars, and the short cloaks and breeches of a long past age; the crowds about the landing-place and in the streets; bronze-looking men with only a poncho or blanket about them; women also of colour, barelegged, with short petticoats of different hues and with rebozos, or head-scarfs of yellow and red stripes, under which the little brown baby some carried on their back peeped forth with black and glittering eyes. There, too, were pure Indian girls with light dresses of a stuff as dark as their own skins, their long black tangled locks plaited with scarlet ribbon; priests with shovel hats, and friars of various orders in loose robes with

bare and sandaled feet; aguadores and cargadores, and leperos in plenty, hideous with sores and rags; noisy vendors of dulces, diarios and garbonzas, *i.e.*, sweet nuts, newspapers, and chick-peas, itinerant guitar-players, and Spanish gentlemen mounted on handsome horses with high demi-pique saddles and silver stirrups, gold-embroidered angueros, or saddle-cloths, edged with dark fringe and rows of little bells, their sombreros and velvet jackets ornamented with gold, their slit pantaloons with lace and rows of silver buttons down the seams, their boots of stamped leather, and their serapes or graceful mangas having capes of bright-hued velvet. In costume, bearing and aspect, every group and every individual figure might have formed worthily an artist's study.

English and Spanish sailors were numerous amid the crowd which surveyed Lennard as he was conducted through the wide and principal street of Vera Cruz, the flat-roofed houses of which are so baked by the sun, that they all seem as if scorched or blackened by fire; but picturesque-like men and women were seen in the broad covered balconies, and overhead dozing on the cornices, were the black sopilotes gorged with garbage. The glare and heat of the sun were great, but the footways lay chiefly under the piazzas of the houses, which thus afford coolness at such times and a shelter in those of rain.

As a whole, the town seemed dull and lifeless; for the grass grew, and the drifted sand-heaps rose high in the quaint old Spanish-looking thoroughfares.

The aspect of the place depressed Lennard's spirit, and his ideas of the majesty of Mexican laws were not enhanced when he saw in the very centre of the principal street a man lying dead on his back pierced by three revolver bullets—a gaily dressed arriero, or muleteer, shot in some quarrel, and left there till his friends or the alguazils found time to take him away ere the sopilotes came with their ravenous beaks at nightfall. Half pausing, Lennard regarded this sight with astonishment.

"How now," said an alguazil; "is no one ever killed in your country, that you look so white and strange?"

"Move on, hombre mio," said another, giving him a push with his baton, or staff.

"Why hurry the poor picaro?" cried a lame lepro; "don't you see how he drags his right leg after the left?"

"True," said another of the crowd; "he has certainly had his dancing marred by a chain and cannon ball in the mines of Potosi."

These remarks were unheeded by Lennard, who at that time really felt a little lameness consequent to the wound he had received from the air-gun and the marshy atmosphere of the swamp of Gallega.

After a little time he was freed from the annoyance of the crowd, when the officers of justice conducted him through the vestibule, and into the spacious hall of the Casa del Ayuntamiento, or Town-house; and he speedily found himself at the bar, and before one of the magistrates, who, though he knew it not, was Don Juan Leonardo, who was about to examine him, chiefly from motives of curiosity, prior to a more formal trial in a criminal court; so the proceedings that ensued were somewhat like those which little Mr. Dabchick, in his legal jargon, would have termed "a precognition;" yet such as they were, Lennard Blair's life or liberty seemed to hang on the issue.

He looked earnestly at the alcalde, who occupied a high chair at a desk which was covered with papers. Don Juan was past fifty years of age, and though thin and spare in figure, was still strikingly handsome. His forehead was high and thoughtful; the temples were somewhat indented; his nose was a fine aquiline, and he had thick black moustaches well curled up at each end in the old Spanish fashion. His eyes were a rich dark hazel, and had in them a kind and earnest—some thought, a sad—expression, while his manner was pleasing and his voice mellow and winning.

Lennard thought that his face dreamily reminded him of some of the antique portraits at Blairavon, and he felt that he had everything to hope for from such an examiner, for Don Juan possessed a gentleness and suavity, a well-bred air that seemed a remnant of other times, of an older day, when deportment and grace were the study of a gentleman, and when the free and easy *brusquerie* of the present age was unknown.

"I am willing to hear all you have to say, prisoner," said Don Juan, with a slight bow; "but beware how you say aught that may criminate yourself—this being but a preliminary examination."

When a young man, who seemed to officiate as a clerk to the court, read the charges, which we give, as follows, omitting the reiterated dates and legal prolixity of the paper, Lennard obtained a speedy clue to the entire mystery.

"Señor Alcalde, the prisoner Lennard Blair, a British subject, but nevertheless amenable to the laws of Mexico, landed here exactly this day five months ago, from the English steamer *Valparaiso*."

(The start of surprise which Lennard gave on hearing this strange announcement, did not escape the notice of the alcalde.)

"There are before you the documentary proofs of no less than three forgeries committed by him in this city—two on the Bank of Vera Cruz, and one on the firm of Leonardo and Co.; of his subsequent leaguing with banditti, and being present with them at two robberies of the mail—one on the road to Xalappa, and the other on the road to Tampico. In the last affair, a planter named Sebastian el Ranchero was stabbed to death by a knife, which weapon is now before you, and bears the name of 'Lennard Blair' on the handle. It was found near the dead body, as can be proved by competent witnesses, who are in the ante-room, and ready for examination. Of the actual crime of assassination some proofs are yet required; but Don Salvador Gonzalez assures me they shall speedily be forthcoming. To evade punishment for these misdemeanours the prisoner would seem to have fled, but was detected by Don Ignacio Saavedra, on board the steamer from Cuba, *Neustra Señora del Guadaloupe*, having had the hardihood to return, within three weeks after committing the outrage on the road to Tampico."

The *Valparaiso!* It was by that identical steamer Travice Cheatwood had sailed from Liverpool to South America in Lennard's name, and with so much of his property.

"So—so," thought he, "my evil genius is here—even here."

"Señor Alcalde," he began impetuously, "there is an absurd mistake in all this; I did not land here or anywhere else from the *Valparaiso*——"

"His name—Lennard Blair—was on all his baggage, which was conveyed from that ship to a venta in the city," continued the clerk; "and even on his linen, the same name which appears on this blood-stained weapon."

Here the clerk held up a clasp-knife, which Lennard immediately recognised as having been his own.

"Here also is a letter of credit, given by the Señores Vere and Company, of Liverpool, which supplied him with funds till he betook him to forgery. It ends, 'quedo rogando á Dios me garde su vida muchos anos, *John Vere and Co., Liverpool.*'"

As Lennard listened, he knew that the letter in question—one written by himself, and signed by Mr. Vere—must also have been found among the baggage with which Cheatwood had absconded; and perceiving that the magistrate was regarding him with a lowering eye, he naturally became both anxious and exasperated.

"Señor Alcalde," said he, "I am a British subject, ignorant of your laws here in Mexico, nor caring to learn them, but most earnest in my desire not to break them. I have not done so, nor could I by any human possibility have done so, being arrested the instant the steamer came alongside yonder pier—even before I had placed my foot on South American soil. It is my misfortune to be arraigned before you under a misconception, which can easily be explained; but, first, I demand the presence and protection of Her Britannic Majesty's Consul."

"He has neither the power nor the will to protect forjadors or assassins; moreover, your case has already been before him."

"I deny that I am the person who committed these crimes!"

"Do you deny that you gave your name to the captain of the Cuban steamer, whose list of passengers was verified by the Custom-House officers ere he sailed for Tampico?"

"My name is Lennard Blair, I admit; but, it has been assumed by another; for at the time the *Valparaiso* arrived here, and when that very letter of credit was presented, I was in Liverpool waiting my passage by the next steamer, *The Golden Dream*, having to visit Vera Cruz on the business of our house; and I demand that Luke Maynard, captain of that vessel, the survivors of the *Gaviota*, a gentleman named José Saavedra and a lady named Dora Dominga, be examined in my behalf to prove my identity, otherwise these proceedings and my detention are an outrage upon everything judicial—a farce and a cruelty."

"You ask rather too much—at least, more than we can afford you," replied Don Juan, who was not displeased by Lennard's boldness, till his daughter's name was mentioned, when he coloured visibly and angrily, all the more so that there was a tender inflection detectable in the young man's voice as he uttered it. "The survivors of the crew of the *Gaviota* have the best personal reasons for avoiding the hands of our alguazils, and are we know not where. *The Golden Dream* has not returned to these seas; the agents here inform us that, after her voyage back from Vera Cruz, she was taken into dock at Liverpool, and, of course, her crew are scattered beyond our reach."

"Then, señor," said Lennard, who was left to act as his own counsel, "the captain and crew of the Cuban steamer cán prove that they took me off an island in the gulf."

"True—yet that would not disprove your being the committer of the outrages alleged; but she has gone from Tam-

pico back to Cuba thrice since your arrest, so her crew may be changed, and anyway she will not be here for a month."

"Señor," urged Lennard, who found to his surprise that his examination had taken the form of a mere colloquy between himself and the alcalde; "can it be, that you will hear witnesses against me without having one summoned in my favour? Here in Vera Cruz must be two persons at least who can prove my innocence and identity—the senor Saavedra and his god-daughter Donna Dora. But, ere the day of the trial comes, I shall demand the assistance of an abogado—to counsel me for my defence."

"Señor José Saavedra has gone by the steamer to Tampico this morning."

"Every one seems to have gone somewhere, or to be missing," said Lennard, bitterly.

"And the lady you have named must not appear here, if we can avoid it," added Don Juan, haughtily.

"Yet I saved her life in the Arenas—her life for which I would freely have risked my own!" exclaimed Lennard with a burst of emotion, of which the magistrate studiously took no notice, but said—

"You speak Spanish somewhat fluently for an Englishman?"

"I am a Scotsman, Senor Alcalde, and to any Scotsman who knows Latin as taught in his native schools, the Spanish language proves an easy one."

The magistrate looked at Lennard with a keener interest, and said—"I was in Scotland once, but that was long, long ago; thus I would befriend you, if possible, for the mere memory of that time. However, the ends of justice must be answered. Bring in the bank clerks to whom the forged bills were presented, that they may be interrogated."

Three young men, all of colour, were now summoned in succession by name, and each after the other was solemnly sworn over two crossed sword-blades in the old Castilian fashion, and requested to identify the prisoner; but they completely failed to do so. They differed as to his height, but agreed that the presenter of the bills was fair-haired, with a yellow moustache and square goatee-beard.

"The prisoner's hair may have been dyed," suggested the escribano.

"Scarcely, in the castle of San Juan," said the alcalde, smiling.

"But the other man's eyes were of a light colour, almost green; he could not dye *them*," said one clerk.

"Moreover, Señor Alcalde," added another, with that

suavity of manner peculiar to all half-bloods, "the presenter of the bills was totally ignorant of Spanish, which we hear the prisoner speaks fluently."

Lennard felt intensely grateful to these young men.

An arriero, or muleteer, swore to finding the dead body of Sebastian el Ranchero (the farmer) and the knife now produced; but further proofs of who actually committed the crime were now required.

"If I dare not demand, at least permit me to entreat, Señor Alcalde, that the Señor José Saavedra be examined on oath, if not the—the—young lady. He must prove that I am the Lennard Blair who came with him from Liverpool, and had the honour to befriend him more than once. He must be ignorant of the dreadful condition to which I have been reduced, and she—she, too, must also be ignorant—at least—I hope so," he added in a broken voice, "otherwise they had not abandoned me as they would seem to have done. I repeat to you, that I am the only and true Lennard Blair who came to Vera Cruz as administrator for Vere & Co., of Liverpool, from whence I sailed on the 24th of November last year; and that the other is an impostor named Travice Cheatwood, who robbed me and sailed by the *Valparaiso* in my name, all of which can be proved by communicating with Mr. Vere, or the authorities in England."

As Lennard spoke, Don Juan had been regarding him with a strange interest. His moustache, though untrimmed, did not conceal the perfect shape of a cleanly cut mouth, which was of a form remarkably handsome—even delicate for a man—and its short upper lip quivered occasionally with suppressed emotion and just indignation.

"I sincerely hope that all you assert may be proved," said the alcalde; "and that the ends of justice may be quite fulfilled; on the day of trial I shall have the Señor Saavedra, and even the young lady you have named, produced in court——"

"For that promise I thank you!" exclaimed Lennard, as he thought in his heart, "I shall see her once again—even though for the last time!"

"I repeat that this is but a preliminary examination. The proofs that we have waited for cannot now be long in arriving; till then I have no resource but to remand you again to the castle of San Juan de Ulloa."

Lennard started forward; he was about to make some earnest and forcible appeal against being sent back to that horrible place of detention; but this was quickly frustrated or anticipated by the quaintly-attired alguazils, who were

evidently accustomed to such outbreaks and attempts, for they roughly and at once pulled him away, and another hour saw him in his former cell. Well-nigh hopeless now, careless and reckless of the future, and feeling no impatience even for the day of trial which might change his miserable career, either by death or liberty—death by the iron collar of the garotte—for the sullen obduracy of martyrdom was beginning to possess him, and his once light and buoyant spirit had vanished.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TRAVICE CHEATWOOD REDIVIVUS.

THOUGH Lennard knew it not, at the very moment when his taciturn warder was securing by a ponderous bolt the door of his white vaulted chamber, the stars were becoming favourable to him.

Don Juan who had been propitiously impressed by the earnestness of the young man's bearing, and the bold energy with which he maintained his innocence, was perplexed, however, to hear him assert that he had known and befriended Saavedra, and that he had saved the life of Dora, circumstances to which, for reasons already given, neither had ever referred.

Resolving to discover what these assertions on one hand, and the concealment of such facts on the other meant, he was just leaving the town-house and about to mount his horse, when Captain Salvador Gonzalez galloped up and dismounting in haste said—"I must crave a word with you, Señor Don Juan. My lieutenant and his detachment have just come in from the mountains, and he has brought me some remarkable evidence concerning this ubiquitous and double Lennard Blair, who seems to have been in England and Mexico, on sea and land at one and the same time."

"Indeed," replied the surprised alcalde; "the person whom I have just remanded to the castle opposite, asserts most stoutly that he came from Liverpool in the same steamer with my daughter, whom he only knows as Donna Dora, and with José Saavedra, to both of whom he rendered services of importance, yet neither have ever mentioned such circumstances to me. Donna Dora may have forgotten all about them during her long illness; but Saavedra was actually this young man's most bitter enemy."

Don Juan spoke angrily, for he knew not as yet their reasons for this singular reticence.

"The young fellow is perfectly innocent; we have taken him for himself, and yet mistaken him for another."

"A paradox, Gonzalez."

"These papers will explain all."

"I am glad of it!" exclaimed Don Juan; "I thought there was something fine about the lad—strange it is—a namesake, too," he added, ponderingly.

"In one of the barrancas on the eastern slope of the Coffre de Perote," began the officer, "my men surrounded the last remains of the quadrilla de picaros who have frequented the highways, eight in number, and knocked them all over by a volley from their rifles. When retiring, in a species of wigwam formed of palm-leaves and sugar-canes, they found two more of the party dying of mortal wounds, which they had received in a very singular manner. Having met a woman of the Puebla de Perote, who was returning from market after selling four arrobas of coffee, and knowing that she must have the proceeds about her person, they demanded her money. One of them, an Englishman, doing so with a knife in his hand, and apparently resolved to use it too; for he was starving of hunger, and infuriated by chinguirito, or sugar-cane spirits.

"The poblana was a woman of half Indian blood, and having the subtlety to dissemble, she said,—

"'Señores, I have sold but four arrobas of coffee——'

"'We saw you taking it to market on a mule, One hundredweight of fine coffee must have produced something," said the other robber, who proved to be Trebucio Trocadero, a man of bad repute round all the Gulf of Mexico.

"'All the poor arrobas produced are in my bodice, señores,' whined the woman; 'and if you will lend me a knife wherewith to cut the seams, you shall have it, even to the last quartil.'

"The unwary Englishman gave her his knife; but, instead of turning its point towards her own boddice, she stabbed him in the region of the heart; then, quick as lightning, she dashed the weapon into the throat of Trocadero, and leaving it there, fled, shrieking towards the puebla.

"These were the men my soldiers found in the barranca, lying under the shelter of a few palm-leaves for coolness, and they were dying. The Englishman, who was a timid fellow, declared, with tears in his eyes, that he had no intention of using his knife against the poblana, but merely desired to frighten her into the surrender of her purse, an avowal which drew upon him the bitter execrations of the revengeful Trocadero, till the violence of the latter's emotion half choked him with blood.

"The dying Englishman now announced in very broken Spanish (and my lieutenant took his words in writing) that his real designation was Travice Cheatwood, a native of Liverpool in Britain; that he had come hither under the assumed name of the Lennard Blair who is now a prisoner in the castle of San Juan; that he had robbed the said Blair, and assumed his place in the steamer *Valparaiso*—in every point corroborating the story and asserting the innocence of the person you have just remanded. He declared himself, however, to be guiltless of the assassination of Sebastian the Ranchero, who had fallen by the hand of a Yucataco. This and other parts of his confession, which he has signed, and which also bears the signature of Trebucio Trocadero, *in articulo mortis*, show that he felt the greatest contrition for his misspent life. Both men died that night, and my soldiers buried them in a hole by the wayside, piling up stones to save their remains from the jaguars, and setting up a wooden cross to mark the place. This is the document," concluded the officer, placing a paper in the hands of Don Juan, over whose pale face a flush of eagerness and satisfaction spread, as he said hurriedly—"This must at once be laid before the Corregidor, and his order obtained for the young gentleman's release!"

"My lieutenant says that the man Travice Cheatwood was fair-haired, with a square-cut beard, exactly answering the description given of him by the bank clerks and others who saw him after landing from the *Valparaiso*, while he whom I arrested on board the Cuban steamer is tall and dark, with a brown moustache."

"And, now, señor, to repair the wrong we have done him."

"If possible."

"How?"

"By the shame of arrest we may have ruined him for life—blasted his prospects in trade!" said the officer, regretfully.

"Dios no quiero—I hope not!" exclaimed Don Juan, as they rode off together in search of the Corregidor; "I shall get a warrant for his release, and have him brought to my office in the city till we consider what can be done with him. The authorities—ourselves included—have committed a most unfortunate mistake!"

CHAPTER LXXV.

LENNARD A LA MEXICAINE.

LENNARD, seated once more in his white-walled and low-arched chamber, gazing listlessly through the grated win-

dow on the flat marshes of Gallega, knew nothing of the turn his fortune was taking, or of the dark tragedy which had closed the life of him whom he aptly termed his evil genius, now lying uncoffined in unconsecrated earth—buried like a dog—and sharing the same grave with the horrible Trocadero in that lonely ravine on the slope of the stupendous Coffre de Perote.

"Remanded again to prison," he was whispering to himself; "remanded, and for how long?"

So full was he of bitter thoughts, so oppressed by the gloomy prospects of his position, so disappointed that after his long detention and all the interrogations he had undergone, he should find himself consigned to the same place for an unknown period, that he did not hear the massive door unclosed, or the horrid clatter of its external iron bar; he took heed of nothing till a hand was laid on his shoulder. He started as if from sleep, and looked up to see one of the alguazils in his quaint costume, which, save that it was all black, somewhat resembled in fashion that which Ancient Pistol wears upon the stage.

This person briefly informed him, to his utter bewilderment, that he was—free!

That the full confession of the real culprit was in the hands of the Corregidor, and that he had come to conduct him to the presence of the alcalde, who again desired to see him.

Lennard did not comprehend all this; but he could understand, with a gasp of joy, that he was now a free man.

"Free! let follow what may, I am free—God be thanked!" he exclaimed, and was in such haste to leave, that he forgot even to bid adieu to his taciturn warder.

Again he left San Juan by its principal gate, crossed the canal, or wet fosse, and again found himself in the same boat, being rowed towards the city, while the alguazil once more endeavoured to explain how all this came to pass, and politely enough congratulated him on his restoration to liberty and honour.

A great revulsion of feeling was caused by all this. The mental gloom vanished; the sunshine danced more brightly on the water now than it had ever seemed to do, when viewed from yonder frowning mass of towers and batteries. The ships with their flags looked more gay; even sombre Vera Cruz seemed to grow livelier in aspect; and with something akin to curiosity, interest, wonder, or pity, he could now survey the motley crowds which he had seen before at the landing-place, and in the principal street, through which he was conducted to the Calle de San Se-

bastian, and there ushered into the office of Don Juan, who was seated at a desk, in a luxuriantly furnished chamber, which, with all its elegance, still evinced that it was unmistakably a place for business, by the shelves of day-books and ledgers, the japanned tin boxes, dockets of letters on the tables, the files of the *Diario*, maps of Cuba, Honduras, Spanish calendars, and so forth, which hung on the gaily papered walls.

On ushering him in, the alguazil, as if his duty was over, bowed politely and retired.

"I meet you under happier and better auspices than we did some two hours since, Señor Lennard," said the alcalde pleasantly, while presenting his hand, with a broad smile on his handsome and usually grave face; and then he drew forward a chair for his somewhat bewildered visitor.

"The alguazil has explained much to me, señor," said the latter; "but I should like a further detail of all this rather fatal mistake from yourself."

"That you shall have, and speedily; but first you must have some refreshment—you look pale and fatigued."

"I thank you, señor—I have indeed undergone much mental suffering," said Lennard, with a sigh.

"Wine—and quickly," said Don Juan to a black servant, who answered his hand-bell.

"You came here to found a branch of the house of Vere & Co., of Liverpool?"

"Yes—and to inquire into the misdeeds of a certain merchant captain named Trocadero."

The alcalde regarded the young man for a few moments with grave interest, and said—

"Another time we shall talk over these things; you have suffered too much to be annoyed by business matters at present; so, meantime, take your wine. I am that Juan Leonardo with whom you so often corresponded. You always wrote me in Spanish, in lieu of Mr. Envoyse, signing, as I remember, 'L. B. *por* Vere and Co.'"

"Yes."

"How little could we then foresee that we should meet as we have done! so Señor Lennard, as we are almost namesakes, I am interested in you, and as I once knew a family of your name—but that was long, long ago—I shall do my best to befriend you."

"I thank you gratefully," replied Lennard, with a swelling sensation in his heart.

"We owe you many apologies for our rough treatment, which is not calculated to impress you favourably with our

people in Vera Cruz; and as the signer of the warrant by which Gonzalez arrested you, none owe you a greater amende perhaps than I; but grave suspicions were abroad, and the similarity in name coupled you with the person who had assumed yours. Hence all these mistakes, which are fully explained now. You are free, and I shall be happy—honoured, indeed, by a visit from you at my villa (which is some miles from town), in token that you forgive the past. Though I have almost forgotten my own language amid the perpetual use of Spanish, I am, like yourself, by birth a Briton, and should like to have a long, long talk about the old country."

"Don Juan, thanks indeed for all this kindness. I shall visit you with pleasure; but will not the disgrace of my arrest seriously affect the interests of Vere & Co. in the business community here?"

"Scarcely—but of that anon," said Don Juan, with an inexplicable and—as Lennard thought—rather unpleasant smile; "after dinner this evening we shall talk over all that, and see what can be done for you. As you lost everything when the *Gaviota* was wrecked among the Arenas, a few doubloons cannot be unacceptable now," he added, writing for Lennard a cheque for a handsome sum on the Bank of Vera Cruz. "The barber and tailor must do the rest," he continued laughing; "for at present you are rather wild in aspect and dilapidated in costume. One of my clerks shall accompany you through the city. Return at five, when the carriage will be here to take us into the country; till then, adios, señor."

Invigorated by a glass or two of excellent wine—a beverage which he had never tasted while incarcerated in San Juan—feeling happy in the confidence of perfect freedom, and that once again he would be enabled, under admirable auspices, to turn his attention resolutely to work as of old—he resolved to lose no time in having his attire replaced by one more suitable, his visage shorn of its hirsute appendages, and his tangled locks reduced to their usual length; but the clerk evinced great disgust of the duty assigned to him, in guiding one he deemed a scarecrow through the principal streets of the city.

During Blair's absence Don Juan sat for some time at his desk, full of reflection.

He thought he could now see the motive of the elder Saavedra for concealing all knowledge of the real Lennard Blair, and even for blackening his character so industriously in public and in private. It was to further his nephew's suit and was thoroughly Spanish in some of its features.

But then there was Dora—why was she silent? Had they ever met or been intimate in England?

He resolved to question Lennard; but meant to do so with some address and circumspection, lest he might compromise the name of his daughter.

"If," thought he, "there has been, as I strongly suspect, any tenderness between Dora and this young man during their long sea voyage—and what could be more likely, when she is so charming?—I shall certainly keep her at her aunt's convent till he quits Vera Cruz for England, or to join a firm in Cuba, to which I shall give him a letter of introduction. Saavedra has perhaps seen more than he dare tell me, and Dora feels more than she cares to admit; and hence her silence—perhaps her illness. Poor girl! she may have suffered deeply! This must all be seen to, and our young waif sent out of Vera Cruz at any price. I should like to study his character, though. He is unfortunate—more than he actually knows; and—I—I was poor myself once."

So thought Don Juan, with knitted brows; forgetting that "the best-laid schemes of mice and men" are often baffled in the sequel.

Dora, too, was the subject of Lennard's deepest thoughts, and he longed to learn from Don Juan who and where she was. However, he was not without an emotion of decided pique at her for having neglected him, or for having, to all appearance, committed his wrongs—perhaps his memory—to oblivion. He should certainly question this merchant, Leonardo—an assumed name, by the way, if the latter was an Englishman—on the first suitable occasion; but some tidings which he received from that gentleman concerning affairs at home almost eclipsed for a time his pique at Dora, by giving him cause for serious considerations of another kind.

Punctually at five in the evening, he presented himself at the office of Don Juan, where stood the magnificent carriage in which, though he knew it not, his own Dora had been so recently driven to the Guadaloupe convent, and the cushions and silken lining of which were still redolent of the perfume of her dress; and as they drove off the merchant was much amused and greatly pleased by the change effected in Lennard's appearance. He wore a very handsome dress: a black velvet jacket, trimmed with silver on the breast and sleeves; bullion wings on the shoulders; a gay scarlet sash and double pantaloons, the outer being slashed up the side with rows of tiny bell buttons; a sombrero, with a broad scarlet satin ribbon floating from it over his right arm. His dark

hair was cut short, and his face entirely shaven of all save his thick and well-pointed moustache. Thus no one could have recognised in him the seedy and tattered fellow whom the angry and blushing clerk had guided through the streets of the city.

"Bravo—you are quite *à la Mexicaine!*" exclaimed Don Juan, laughing at the metamorphosis.

Ere two days were past Dora had read the whole affair in the *Diario*, which had a column on the subject, and concluded by stating "that Mr. Lennard Blair was at present the guest of Don Juan Leonardo, whose eccentric, but perhaps pardonable sympathy for the English, particularly shipwrecked sailors, had frequently been remarked in Vera Cruz. All the statements made by the ill-used young gentleman—for whose sufferings H.B.M. Consul was inconsolable—are, we understand, fully corroborated by his particular friend, Señor José Saavedra, with whom he travelled from England."

"Oh, why did my coward heart shrink from defending him—why commit his name and love to silence? Lennard—Lennard—mi vida! mi alma!" she exclaimed, amid a gust of tears and grief, as she replaced his ring on her engaged finger, and kissed it again and again, regardless of all that her kind, but somewhat austere aunt could urge on the impropriety of such proceedings, over which she thoughtfully smoked more than one cigarito, after the manner of all married and elderly dames in the land of Montezuma.

Dora's heart began to dance again with delight. Lennard was free, and innocent—she was certain he would prove so in the end—but to be the guest of "her own papa," was beyond her expectations! Could such happiness last for ever? But she blushed for herself when reflecting that much of the frankness and candour which a three years' residence in Europe had developed in her really impulsive and generous nature, had become chilled under the local influences of her Mexican home, and those prudish ideas of etiquette and punctilio which the Moors have engrafted on the Spaniards, and thus cause a Spanish girl to tremble in her heart lest her friends should learn that she loves, or is beloved. Thus the piquante little Dora—of the Preston Station—of the saucy hat, Balmoral boots and reefing jacket, with anchor buttons, had become a veritable Mexican donna again!

That diminutive gentleman, José Saavedra, also saw the *Diario*, when over his coffee one morning in a venta at Tampico; and he twisted his long moustaches up to his ears, while treading the paper under his heel. Aware how trea-

cherously he had acted, he resolved to protract his absence for some weeks, till the affair might perhaps be forgotten, or Lennard Blair should have left Vera Cruz. Great was the surprise, and greater still the disgust of his nephew, Don Ignacio, on learning that one whom he fully knew to be a favoured rival, was actually located in the Villa Leonardo, if that lying print, the *Diario*, was to be trusted!

But he consoled himself by saying in the cafés, on the Alameda, and other places of public resort,

"Rich as Don Juan is—I must cut his acquaintance. Par todos los demonios! One can't know people who pick up their friends in the castle of San Juan. The little girl is all very well; but would be nothing without the doubloons of her papa."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

A SHOCK AND A PROPOSAL.

To Lennard the change from the monotony of his seclusion in San Juan, the drive through the open country from Vera Cruz, after the somewhat gloomy streets and drifted red sand-heaps of the latter were left behind, proved very delightful.

The barren district around the city once passed, pretty Indian villages came in view, nestling amid trees and flowers—the huts of slender yellow bamboo canes being roofed by broad leaves now withered and brown. Around towered green groves of the palm, the plantain and banana, under the cool and dewy shade of which, flocks of goats with silky hair, white as the driven snow, were browsing. The whole country was covered with verdure, trees, and flowers, the latter in every variety of blossom, filling the earth below, and the air above with fragrance; for magnificent and wondrous parasitical creepers had been garlanded by nature's hand from branch to branch in the most fantastic forms.

As the carriage swept past, the Indian women with their long, black, and glittering eyes, their parti-coloured skirts, and dingy little ones slung on their backs, came rushing out of their wigwams to clap their hands; others who sat at the doors, weaving green garlands and bright bouquets for the shrine of our Lady of Guadaloupe, or some local saint, would look quietly up and smile, showing a row of dazzling teeth.

Flowers—flowers were everywhere, and amid a district

where the fields of maize, sugar, and coffee were bordered by hedges of great scarlet blossoms—by bell-shaped lilies of exquisite fragrance, with petals that were purple or white, where trees of double pink roses lined the highway, and a stupendous mountain scenery with blue and distant peaks, the Cordilleras of Anahuac, formed the background—the carriage soon brought them to the villa Leonardo, which has been described in a preceding chapter; but the vastness, the palatial aspect and luxury of which, impressed Lennard with a high idea of the great wealth of his new friend.

Its magnificent sala; its chambers, the walls of which were charmingly painted with religious subjects; the cabinets of ebony and other fine wood elaborately inlaid with silver and gold; the marble floors, the variety of rich and elegant objects—more than all, the bedroom which was assigned him, with its draperies of white muslin and rose-coloured silk; its cedarwood floor, and roof painted light-blue and starred with silver; the lofty open windows, through which the breeze of evening came from the Cordilleras laden with the perfumes of a thousand flowers; the bed itself, with its blue silk coverlet, richly laced pillows, and closely fitting mosquito curtains, all struck Lennard forcibly, especially after the squalor of his white little cell in the castle of San Juan de Ulloa; and he was excessively impressed, too, by his own figure as reflected in the tall cheval mirror, where he could contemplate his full length in that striking costume *à la Mexicaine*.

Had Lennard looked much about the drawing-room, he would have found many a trace of her he longed for: music and books on which her name was written at full length; her album of photographs; a portrait of herself painted in England and sent out to Don Juan a year ago. It hung in a conspicuous place; but was now covered with muslin to protect it from insects.

Dinner over—and it was a sumptuous one: the display of silver plate, crystal, and flowers seemed a glimpse of fairy-land; the soup was wonderful, the fish delicious, the entrées and patés hot with red *chilé* and recherche; the champagne and pine-apple ice cold as if they had come direct from Baffins Bay. Don Juan and Lennard betook them to cigars and claret, and then gradually the former began to talk of business; for he had much to impart to his visitor—much that might pain him, and should be done gently.

"So we are, as I said this morning, namesakes, señor," said Don Juan, while pondering how he might introduce what he had to impart.

"Nearly," said Lennard bowing.

"More nearly than you think; for Leonardo is but another version of Lennard; they are identically the same name."

"True, señor — of course," said Lennard, smiling, and wondering if such was the name borne by his host in his own country, and before he became so thoroughly *à l'Espagnole*.

"Hence I feel bound to befriend you if I can. In Mexico. the ties of blood are strong in families, and thus the similitude of name should have some weight."

"I thank you, Don Juan. With regard to one of my express commissions here, now as Trebucio Trocadero is dead——"

"Pardon an interruption, I did not wish to spoil the first good dinner you have had for many a day--(I pay my French cook fifty dollars per month; and after the garbanzos, plantains, and garlic messes of San Juan, I trust you found his efforts pleasing); but now, over our wine and cigars, you must, I regret to say, prepare yourself to hear something very unpleasant, and of which you seem to be in perfect ignorance."

"Dora is married—married or dead!" thought Lennard, and his heart died within him, while he gazed breathlessly into the long, grave face of the speaker.

"So far as concerns Trocadero, there can be no doubt that the ships being old and worthless, Mr. Vere bribed him to scuttle them when in ballast or with sham cargoes, to save the insurances."

"Bribed him!" exclaimed Lennard, astonished to find some of his suspicions corroborated here. "Was he capable of such an act?"

"Yes; and of worse than that," was the curt rejoinder.

"That they were in secret correspondence, I had ocular proof by the fragment of a letter when on board the *Golden Dream*."

"All these details are valueless, señor; and it matters little whether Vere & Co. were cognisant of these nefarious acts in the Bahama Channel and elsewhere, as they are bankrupt now."

"What, Don Juan, has our house stopped payment?" exclaimed Lennard aghast.

"Stopped payment, amigo mio! I should think so and worse," replied his host, lighting a fresh cigar.

"What could be worse than that?"

"A rotten bankruptcy—rotten to the very core; no assets

or anything. The claret-jug stands with you. Take another cigar," said Don Juan kindly, as he pushed towards Lennard a case on wheels—a miniature temple of silver, full of cigars, and labelled in blue enamel, "Lugerdita—El Diabolo Marino—Flor perla Cubano," and so forth.

"When did this happen?" asked Lennard in a low voice.

"More than two months ago."

"But what brought such a catastrophe to pass?"

"Oh, the old, old story!" replied Don Juan, while Lennard felt his heart grow very sick indeed. "Many were the reasons alleged: sums drawn out of their hands suddenly by cautious individuals, tightness of the money-market, difficulty in the negotiations of loans to meet emergencies; losses by sea—particularly in the Bahama Channel; bad debts in Costa Rica; every mercantile excuse under the sun."

"When I left Liverpool for Scotland in the early part of last year, all seemed sound enough."

"The truth is, Mr. Vere is an admirable example of those mushroom financiers, who of late years have disgraced the English mercantile world, and who, while wallowing in gold, somehow suddenly smash, and have no dividend to pay."

"Oh, what is all this you tell me?" exclaimed Lennard, with growing excitement. "Every shilling I had in the world, amounting to some thousand pounds, I invested in Vere's hands."

"Sorry to hear it, amigo mio—sorry to hear it," replied Don Juan, gravely. "I am old enough to be your father, and know that I tell you but the often told tale, for I can see it all—the game that is without a chance of success for such as you, where treachery and guile on one side, are opposed to manly integrity on the other. The devil, unseen, always puts his ugly paw into the wrong scale."

Failed—ruined—was it indeed so? He shrunk from the conviction that such should be the case, for there are events which seem too fearful to be possible, and, to Lennard Blair, who had embarked his little all in the firm of Vere & Co., this was one of these.

Miss Hesbia Vere was married, he understood Don Juan to say. Well, he could hear *that* with tolerable indifference now, and he could remember her last words when they parted never to meet again. To be rejected for Crowdy—the pale and cadaverous Crowdy—was a wound for which he had found a balm; but to be so completely duped by the smooth-tongued and smiling Vere, was exasperating. These,

then, were the impending calamities which Mr. Envoyse had hinted he "was pretty well in the dark about." All his delusions were at an end. He had been jilted by a flirt, jewed by a swindler, and was now in a foreign land, penniless, and worse, perhaps, if considered as the representative of Vere & Co. !

"My last investment in the firm—" Lennard was beginning, in a cracked voice, for his throat was parched and dry.

"You do not seem to have ranked as a partner, which, under the circumstances, is perhaps, fortunate now—nor even as a creditor. Not a trace of your name appeared in the books or proceedings, save as one of the clerks. I read the whole affair in the *Times*."

Lennard drained a bumper of claret, and thought he must be dreaming.

"And the baronet's bubble company—the great steam-packet line, in which I was to have had shares——"

"Never existed ; or, if intended at all, was never developed, for Vere's insolvency and Crowdy's character as a swindler speedily became so. The total destruction by fire and water of some coal-mines in Scotland—a speculation on which Vere spent vast sums and much energy—was the culminating point of his growing misfortunes. Perhaps he did not mean ultimate fraud ; but his connection with a person like Sir Cullender finished all. The estate which he made over to his daughter, Lady Crowdy, has also come into the market."

"In the general wreck he might have had the humanity to spare the little remnant of my patrimony," said Lennard, whose thoughts went home to Oakwoodlee.

"What was its rental ?"

"About two hundred per annum."

Don Juan smiled.

"That sum," said he, "is a joke—a mere hollow gourd to a gold-mine, when compared with the involvements of others who have been similarly deluded. You are young, and have yet life and the wide world before you, and should thank your stars that, like old Mr. Abel Envoyse, who served the firm so long and faithfully, you have not a wife and little ones depending on your work for food, shelter, and raiment. The truth would seem to be that the firm had sustained many, many losses before you left England, and had engaged in some of Sir Cullender's many London bubbles. As trustee for several persons, Vere had the power of using sums be-

longing to others—sums to which he had no right, but which he intended (let us hope) to replace if his speculations proved successful; but each in its turn failed—the old story—so the crash came! As I have said, no fraud might have been intended in the sequel, but in the Bankruptcy Court all sounded very like it."

"No fraud, Don Juan?" queried Lennard, impatiently.

"God forgive that I should say so, but it *must* have been intended, for double sets of books had been kept—books that were cooked up to the occasion, cut down, interleaved, and re-bound, to the utter confusion of all examination. But do you know that I hold nearly two thousand pounds' worth of your acceptances?"

"For Heaven's sake! do not say of mine, Don Juan."

"Dios no quiero! Well, of the firm of Vere, Cheatwood, and Co."

"A humble junior partner, as I deemed myself—a shareholder for a moderate sum—I have been cruelly deluded and kept in the dark."

"Mr. Vere has disappeared from Liverpool."

"And the baronet?"

"Was convicted as a fraudulent bankrupt, and he now employs his hours of seclusion in picking oakum. It was a case of mutual mistake; each looked to the other's exchequer for release from pressing difficulties, and looked in vain."

"And—Sir Cullender's—wife?"

"On the very night when the baronet was sent to prison she eloped with a tenor singer; I read it all in the *Times* two months ago."

Lennard sighed over the dark future of the brown-eyed, the bright-looking, and once joyous Hesbia; and remained for some time crushed, perplexed, and lost in thought, until he became aware that Don Juan was speaking again.

"I said that I would befriend you, if I could; and, luckily, I have it in my power to do so, well," he was saying.

"I thank you gratefully," sighed Lennard.

"I am going home to Britain; indeed, I have already transferred the most of what I possess to that country, where I have also bought an estate, in the possession of which I am deeply interested, for it belonged of old to my ancestors, and I was born upon it. Yet I shall leave behind unsold this plantation of Leonardo, that I may still retain some interest in South America, the land where I have made my fortune, and lived so long and happily. The villa I shall sell or let; but there is an excellent house on the brow of

yonder barranca, and that shall be yours, if you choose to remain here as overseer of my property."

Lennard Blair sighed. It would be perpetual banishment too surely, a mere competence perhaps, and in a dangerous climate, for the yellow fever is yearly the deadly scourge of Vera Cruz—the most brief stay there being often sufficient to give the contagion; but he knew that to remain was his only chance of discovering, perhaps of winning, his lost Donna Dora.

"In addition to a natural longing and desire to return home as years come upon me, I have cogent political reasons," said Don Juan. "It is confidently rumoured that we are on the eve of a new insurrection, and that a portion of the Mexican Government, oddly enough, require the expulsion from this country of all Spaniards by birth, Europeans who have intermarried with Spaniards, and, in some instances, their children. So I mean to quit betimes."

As if in a dream, Lennard retired that night to the luxurious bed-chamber provided for him. Reflection was a bitter resource, indeed; but he had no other left him.

Totally impoverished now, he was sinking into the character of a mere dependent on the patronage and bounty of Don Juan, and as such he was further removed by position from Donna Dora than he had been from the daughter of the wealthy Vere!

The proud sense of old family, of station, and unmerited degradation, which such inevitable ruin would have called up at home in the old country, under the irritating presence of successful turpitude or wealthy snobbery, could not be felt on the western side of the Atlantic—in the vast arena of the New World. He would begin his career again, and at once, with a resolute heart, even in the most humble phase, without a blush, and work hard and diligently—but by such work would he ever win Dora?

He had lost all—all but that grim joke, the Charter Stone; and again, as when in the castle of San Juan, he laughed bitterly, in mockery of his own weak superstition and his father's too, in retaining the proprietary of it, instead of having it, as the wretched Travice Cheatwood had once suggested, broken up for road-metal.

Swindled, penniless, abandoned in a far and foreign country; in danger of arrest, perhaps, for his complicity with the disastrous affairs of Vere and Co.!

It was anything but a pleasant situation. He drew the

mosquito-curtains close, tossed feverishly on his richly-laced pillows, and strove to find oblivion in sleep.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

A DAY OF SURPRISES.

By next morning Lennard had made up his mind to take the friendly offer of Don Juan, in assuming the charge of his plantation, until something else "turned up," as the saying is. He meant also to prosecute his search for Donna Dora; but, on descending to the breakfast-room—where he found a morning meal spread quite in the English rather than the Mexican fashion, to wit, with a white table-cloth, a shining coffee-urn, fresh eggs, tea, toast and rolls, and, lying ready for his perusal, that morning's *Diario* and the Mexican daily paper, *La Gazeta del Gobierno*,—a black valet presented him with a note from Don Juan, apologizing for a two-days' absence at Tlacotalpan, a town sixty miles distant from Vera Cruz, on the river of Alvarado, whither he had been summoned by daybreak on pressing political business.

Left thus to his own resources, Lennard spent the whole day in riding over the grounds of the hacienda, of which he fully believed he should ere long have the entire charge: but he wandered among fields of sugar-cane, maize, and coffee; among orange-groves covered with fragrant blossoms and golden fruit, bending lemon-trees, and where the rose, the jasmine, and the lily were ever blooming; listlessly, and with his mind full of all he had heard last night—the ruin that had come on others as well as himself; and he was not without great and genuine sorrow for Hesbia Vere, whose too probable future he shrank from contemplating.

But beyond this honest sorrow he felt nothing more; and he agreed with the writer who says,—"I hold it as a rule that nine men out of ten are unfortunate in their first attachments; and I hold it as another rule, that it is a very good thing for them that they are so."

The evening drew on, and he spent it in the library, which he found well stocked with many Spanish and many more English works of the highest class; but next morning he began to long for the return of his host, that he might speak of the subject nearest his heart, and that some definite arrangement might be made and duties assigned him.

In the course of the second day he wandered into the

drawing-room, where he found the usual unmistakable evidences of the residence of a lady in the mansion. The pretty creole Mencia, who flitted about from time to time, in no way averse to a conversation with this handsome young European, could soon have satisfied his curiosity on this point; but Lennard had grown somewhat taciturn, and regardless of her glances and black glittering eyes, never addressed her.

The windows were open nearly from the lofty ceiling to the floor, which was of polished marble. The draperies, like those of the sala, were all of fine blue silk, edged with lace and silver. The fauteuils and couches were also of blue silk, of elegant designs, and of the most luxurious construction, while mirrors, crystal girandoles, glass shades and statuettes were there in profusion, on consoles of veined marble, on satin-wood tables and ebony cabinets inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl.

The grand piano was locked; piles of music filled the stand near it, and from these Lennard instinctively wandered to a picture—a veiled one—that hung close by.

A veiled portrait always excites curiosity, and seems suggestive of some mystery — a story of sorrow, or love, or death; Lennard was alone; his host was still absent, and would probably be so for the rest of the day. There could be no impropriety in looking at the picture; so he withdrew the screen of gauze and beheld the portrait—a full-length cabinet size—of a beautiful, dark-eyed and golden-haired girl. She had the bright, smiling face of Dora—and Dora she was, beyond a doubt, in the very dress in which he had first seen her, on that hurried occasion at the Preston station; but without her piquante little hat and feather, for her wealth of silky tresses flowed over the shoulders of her yachting jacket, in the pockets of which her hands were inserted.

It was the veritable Dora of the torn glove—and her portrait hung here—here in Don Juan's drawing room!

Absorbed in the contemplation of this picture, wondering much, that amid all their confidences, Don Juan had never referred to the circumstance of her existence, and curious to learn from the first domestic he met the exact relationship which the original of this portrait bore to him, Lennard was for a time lost in a maze of conjecture. Rejoicing that he had so suddenly found a clue to her discovery, he continued to gaze on the portrait till a light step roused him, a girlish figure in a white muslin dress sprang through the open

window from the garden, and Dora—his own Dura—living and breathing, flushed with excitement and joy, threw herself into his arms, with passionate eagerness and hoydenish abandon!

Often in his dreams—in that white cell of yonder castle by the sea—had "their spirits rushed together at the meeting of the lips," and now—now the emotion was realized.

"I knew I should find you here," she exclaimed breathlessly; "I read all about you in the *Diario* at the Guadaloupe convent, and then I could stay no longer there. I broke away from my aunt, obtained a hackney coach, and, accompanied by the gardener, a Dominican brother, drove home. And so we have you here—here in the Villa Leonardo;" she continued before Lennard could speak, twining her girlish arms round him, while her eyes were full of tears; "how much you have suffered—undergone—oh mi vida—mi vida—mi alma—you are all the world to me!"

"And I believed she had forgotten me?" thought Lennard with self-reproach.

Entwined in his and pressed against his heart, the fingers of her hand felt its beating; and the perfume of her marvellous golden hair was about him, as her head dropped on his breast and for some minutes they were mutually and literally wrapt in a species of trance, "a love-cloud."

She had not forgotten him; she was true and all could be easily explained. With loving glances her earnest eyes were upturned to his from time to time, her voice so full and rich met his ear in broken accents with half coherent expressions, and her lips trembled nervously when his touched them.

But their first burst and outpouring of joy and tenderness past, the time for questioning came, and for thinking of their relative positions, for while Lennard saw the signs of wealth—yea enormous wealth—on every side,—there fell on his heart something of the old paralyzing chill, that he had felt elsewhere and at another time.

"Did any two persons ever love each other so much as we do, Lennard?" asked Dora softly.

"No, darling—no," he whispered in the blindness of his faith and flush of his passion; "but how and where will it end, love—Dora?"

"*Here* and on this spot!" said a stern voice that made them start, while a low cry escaped Dora, and with his grave face inflamed by anger, Don Juan, who had entered unperceived, whip in hand, with his riding-boots and the velvet cape of his serapé powdered with the dust of a long ride,

stood before them. "How comes it, señor," he demanded, "that I find you on these terms with my daughter?"

"Your daughter, Don Juan—yours?" exclaimed Lennard, in a breathless voice, while the colour fled from his cheek, for there rushed upon his heart the icy conviction that he had met Dora but to lose her by a separation now and for ever, as she must go home to Britain, while he should remain in Vera Cruz, and perhaps without even the subsistence Don Juan had promised him. "Your daughter," he repeated, in a faltering voice; "I thought she was named——"

"Dominga; Saavedra told me of your misconception; but she is Isidora Dominga Leonardo," replied the angry Don Juan; then Lennard recalled the words of the Franciscan chaplain of the prison-fortress, and found that by a series of odd chances he had never learned her entire name till now.

"And how came it, Donna Dora, that you have dared to leave the Guadaloupe Convent until I sent for you? have you forgotten that you are in Mexico, and *not* in England?" asked Leonardo.

"Oh, papa, I read in the *Diario*—that—that—but pray, dear papa, forgive me; I shall never love any one else, and so shall never offend you again," said Dora, who had shrunk down on a sofa, covered with shame and confusion, while her hair fell forward in masses over her downcast face.

"From what Saavedra said, I suspected much," resumed Don Juan, still stern and lofty; "but I confess that this scene has gone quite beyond my expectance, and my patience, too. Dora, follow me into another room. And you, señor, wait for me here, and I shall speak with you again."

"A duel!" thought Lennard, as the father and daughter withdrew. "Oh, he cannot mean that; even in this lawless country the idea would be absurd, considering the difference of our years, and the obligations under which he has placed me. Besides he is Dora's father, and no insult—no provocation should tempt me to meet him as an enemy."

In that moment of supreme joy, when they had met again, and in the fulness of his love for her, jealous pride and a conviction of their inequality of circumstances had been forgotten; but *now* came the reflection that he had humbled himself before her, suing to ask her love that he might be a dependant on her bounty and her father's wealth!

The idea was intolerable, and stung him to the soul! Alike humiliating and repugnant was the prospective chance that he should bluntly be required to quit the villa, with the

insulting injunctions that he was never to enter it again, and never to see her more.

Even while these galling thoughts were passing through his mind, it was impossible for him not to overhear much that passed between Dora and her father in the adjoining apartment, the inner drawing-room, which was separated from the outer, merely by hangings of blue silk; and, indeed, Don Juan seemed to care little whose ears his voice reached.

A Mexican by birth, educated as she had been, even with the better influences consequent to her three years' residence in Europe, Dora thought she had reason to feel great terror and shame on being discovered with a lover, for, until she is married, the young Mexican lady can converse privately with her brothers, uncles, her confessor, and her female friends *only*. "In fact," says the Señora Calderon de la Barca, in her charming travels, "young people have so few opportunities given them of being together, that Mexican marriages must be made in heaven, for I see no opportunities given them of bringing them about on earth. The young men when they meet with young ladies in society, appear devoted to and very much afraid of them. I know but *one* lady in Mexico who has the reputation of having manœuvred all her daughters into great marriages; but they were such beauties that it can have cost her no trouble. As for flirtation, the name is unknown, and the thing also."

Certainly Dora had been permitted more freedom; but to have a lover thus—it all came, as old Saavedra said, "of having lived among the heretical Inglesos."

Lennard could hear that Dora was weeping, while a lengthened and animated conversation, but in a low tone, ensued between her and her father.

After a time the latter suddenly raised his voice and said,—

"With all you tell me of the gratitude that we owe him, this state of matters must not be, and you shall remain in the Guadaloupe Convent until we leave this country, which must be soon now, as we are on the eve of a dangerous pronunciamiento (*i.e.*, revolution)."

"Oh, papa, forgive us—but he was so kind to me during the long voyage in the steamer;—no brother——"

"Could be more attentive. Very likely; I do not doubt it."

"We became such friends," she urged, with sobs.

"I don't approve of chance friendships; understand me, Dora."

"I will, if I can, dear papa."

"You must and shall!" he rejoined impetuously; "You cannot love this mere stranger, whose introduction here has been so inauspicious. He has simply gained an influence over you, which in time you will forget, and perhaps blush for."

"We are betrothed—plighted, papa; and then think of all that happened on that horrible island—how, as I have just told you, he saved my life at the risk of his own, for he was weak, weary, and unarmed, while Trocadero was strong, maddened with wine, and had pistols."

"True, Dora; I shall thank and reward him—yea, love him for all that; but more I cannot do. What ring is that upon your finger?"

"A present, papa."

"From him—this Lennard Blair?"

"Yes, papa."

"Give it to me, instantly!"

Dora obeyed, evidently in tears and with reluctance; and Lennard felt his heart moved on one hand, and his fiery pride galled to madness on the other.

"A strange old-fashioned ring this," said Don Juan, as a flush mounted to his temples; "how, in heaven's name, came he to be possessed of it?"

"It was an heir-loom in his family, dear papa, and was all he had to give me at the time."

"An heir-loom!" said Don Juan, in a voice that was broken and most strangely unlike his own, as he drew back the hangings, and stood before Lennard with the trinket in his hand—a roughly-chased and well-worn old signet-ring, which had been worn by Richard Blair for many a year, and been with him in many a race and hunting-field. It had been *his* father's before him, and bore, on a blood-stone, a stag's-head *caboshed*, with the motto of the Blairs.

"Young gentleman, answer me truly," said Don Juan, in a nervous and anxious manner; "to whom did this ring which you bestowed upon my daughter belong?"

"To my father," replied Lennard, with much of angry pride, at his present humiliated position, swelling in his heart and throat; "to my poor old father, Richard Blair——"

"Of Blairavon and Oakwoodlee, in Lothian?"

"Yes," replied Lennard, amazed to hear the names of the old places mentioned thus, by a total stranger, in Vera Cruz.

"Blairavon is the name of the estate I have just purchased in Scotland——"

"You, Don Juan?" exclaimed Lennard.

"Yes—the estate of which I spoke to you the other evening. Your mother——"

"Has been dead for many a year."

"And your father, Richard Blair?"

"Died on the first of May last year."

"At Beltane—el dia primero de Mayo—the unlucky day of the family!"

"The day on which many things are said to have happened among us, and on which I had an uncle drowned—my father's younger brother, from whom I am named."

"Drowned?" said the other, with a start of surprise; "why boy, your uncle Lennard stands before you! I am he! John Lennard Blair; but, O Santos de los Santos!" he added, for they still spoke Spanish, as he took Lennard's hands kindly between his own, "this is an abrupt and heartstirring discovery—and it has come most singularly about! A Scotsman and a Blair too," he added, while his voice trembled and his eyes filled; "of what was I thinking, when I omitted to question you before this? But then I never heard of your birth—knew not of your existence, or that my poor brother Dick ever had a family; and our surname of Blair is far from being an uncommon one in the old northern kingdom. But, for reasons that are forgotten now, the name became hateful to me, and in a gust of anger and eccentricity I relinquished it, as I thought for ever."

Lennard gazed at Don Juan in a state of utter bewilderment; and save for the veritable names and certain facts to which he referred so fitly, would have deemed him lightheaded. But the explanation of all this must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

UTOPIA.

"And you were not drowned in the little loch at Craigellon?" exclaimed Lennard, when the surprise of all three at these rapid discoveries had somewhat subsided.

"Drowned—no, not at all; I never thought of being so," replied Don Juan.

"Who, then, was discovered by Steinie Hislop's terrier among the reeds, twelve months after your disappearance, in the lochlet by the Craig, and was buried by my father in

the old family tomb, and to whom was the mural slab erected by him on the wall of the village church?"

"That is more than I can tell you, nephew" (how odd this sounded!); "some benighted waif or tipsy wanderer most probably. However, by altering the date, the slab may serve my turn yet."

"From Steinie Hislop and old Elsie Graham I partially learned, uncle Lennard, of your unfortunate attachment and its sequel."

Don Juan smiled sadly.

"Old Elsie and Steinie Hislop—she was scarcely old Elsie then—are *they* still alive? My poor brother Dick, he mourned for me, I suppose—*she*, too, perhaps."

"They named me after you," said Lennard, in a low voice.

"God bless and rest them!" said Don Juan, while, encouraged by the unexpected turn matters had taken, Dora's little hand stole furtively into Lennard's.

"A writer has it that 'in the history of every man who has reasons for being out of his own country there must be something—some debt, misfortune, imbecility, or crime;' well," continued Don Juan, whom we should now rather designate as the elder Blair, "my cause for exile and wandering was an unfortunate early attachment to one who never returned my love."

"Oh, papa," said Dora, with earnest and dilated eyes, and greatly shocked to learn that her mamma had ever a predecessor; "tell us of this—I at least hear it all now for the first time."

"From the beginning to the end, in that unhappy love for the same girl, we were rivals, my brother Dick and I—but never, God be thanked, were we enemies. To go into all the details of those days—my bitter pain, my silent anguish, my torture and despair when I found that she preferred my brother to me, and when their marriage-day came, would now, when all passions are dead within me, be but a useless and a wicked task, indeed."

"Poor papa!" said Dora, parenthetically.

"Richard was extravagant, and yearly lost vast sums on the turf; he loved me well, but I would not be dependent on him, after he—as I deemed it—robbed me of my bride. They were to be married on Beltane morning; but for me to be present as my brother's groomsman was beyond my power of endurance; so, on the evening before, I took the rail for Glasgow in a mood of mind little to be envied, with a few pounds in my pocket, and bidding farewell to home,

unnoticed and unknown, under the name of John Lennard, sailed from the Clyde in a clipper ship for the United States. In the North Atlantic our vessel sprang a leak, after being struck by lightning and otherwise damaged in a storm. As she was sinking fast we had to abandon her, and betake us to the boats. For days and nights after this we were tossed about by the waves and wind, enduring the extremities of hunger, thirst, and despair, till the *Montezuma*, a Spanish barque from Cadiz, picked us up. She was bound for Vera Cruz, but landed us at Tampico. There I obtained employment from a Scottish planter—a veteran of the Venezuelan Legion—whose life I had saved when the diligencia was attacked by robbers, as the overseer of his estates; and being careful and thrifty, I soon began, in this land of gold and silver, of fire and sunshine, verdure and fertility, where the season is but one eternal spring, to amass money almost without its being the result of an effort, for it seemed to pour in upon me.

"Amid the strange scenes of this vast new world, I thought, nephew, to forget the disappointments and sorrows of the old; I was young, and in time I did so.

"You know the old proverb of what one should do when in Rome; so, in Mexico I did as the Mexicans do, and became thoroughly one of themselves, outwardly and completely *à l'Espagnole*. Here Heaven prospered me, beyond my deserts perhaps, and during a residence of nearly thirty years nothing save the loss of my dear wife and two sisters of Dora, for I married a wealthy Spanish lady of Tampico, has marred my tranquillity. Increasing years, the habits of business, experience, and the acquisition of wealth alter and modify the characters of most men; so have they changed and toned down mine; but I have remained in Mexico as your Englishmen usually remain in India, only to make money that I may return home and enjoy it in the winter of my days; and now the time for doing so has come—home to Scotland—to the home of my childhood and youth; to the place before which every other has paled in my memory!

"I begin to have the longing that comes on every wanderer at some time of his career, to die at home, and, as I have said, we are on the eve of a revolution here, which might imperil all I possess, I have transferred it home before me, and have sunk a princely fortune in the British funds and elsewhere. Such is the brief story of my life, nephew Lennard, minus, of course, a thousand details."

"Oh, uncle," said the younger Blair, with a pathos in his

tone, "and all this while—those long thirty years—during which you were realizing this enormous wealth, and while my poor father, your only brother, was sinking lower and lower, parting with acre after acre, and farm after farm, amid debts and difficulties—imprudenees, I admit—you never wrote—never thought of him!"

"There you wrong me."

"He never knew of your existenee."

"I both thought of him and wrote to him again and again, till I grew weary, and then indignant; for, if not dead, I believed he had committed my memory to oblivion."

"Those letters never reached him, otherwise I should have known of them. By some singular mischance all must have miscarried."

"And you were my Brito-Spanish correspondent in the office of Vere & Co.? How passing strange! I remember on that day when the alguazils brought you before me in the town-house, on your speaking, a chord of memory was struck in my heart, and I felt disturbed and restless in my efforts to recall the past; confused and dreamy ideas which I strove in vain to account for and unravel, crowded thick and fast upon me. It must have been your likeness to my poor brother Richard—yea, to myself, as a lad in earlier years; for again and again I asked of myself, where have I seen this face, and where heard that voice? When jestingly I said we were namesakes, how little could I imagine that we were related to each other—and so nearly too!"

Dora's hand was still clasped in that of Lennard, who, after a pause, during which his newly-discovered uncle had been regarding him attentively, said in a soft voice—

"Uncle, remember the love that sent you into exile, and pity ours—mine and Dora's!"

"We shall see in time what we shall see," the other replied, smiling.

"Then may she wear my father's ring?" asked Lennard.

"She may," replied John Blair, as we shall name him for the sake of distinction, and smilingly he placed it on her tiny finger; then thoughtfully he added, "alas on what mere casualties every event of life turns—what straws may decide the destiny of a man!"

"True, uncle," said Lennard (who rather liked to term him thus); "had a wretched fellow not picked away the pocket-book of José Saavedra at Preston I had not made your daughter's acquaintance, or won her confidence, perhaps. Had another luckless wretch not deluded and robbed me in

Liverpool I should have sailed by the *Valparaiso*, and not by the ship which has proved indeed a Golden Dream to me; and Dora, too, probably, would never have had on her finger that dear old ring which, as if it had been a magic one, has led to all this discovery; more than all, she might have perished at the Arenas!"

"It is well; no distance should ever break the ties of family:

> For kindred blood, old proverbs deem,
> Is warmer than the mountain stream.

So says Scott; and I feel much of this forgotten spirit welling up in my heart now."

"And so old Blairavon has come into the market after all, uncle?"

"Vere was not solvent when he executed his trust deed, so the creditors seized all. I saw the estate advertised in an English paper, and wrote at once for its purchase. The vulgar are ever prone to weave up mysteries and horrors with the history of any old house and family, and nowhere so much as at home in old romantic Scotland. Thus it is a local tradition that the fortune of him who possesses the lands of Blairavon depends upon the further proprietary, as of course you have heard, of a block, known as the Charter Stone——"

"Which is mine!" exclaimed Lennard laughing, and with radiant eyes—"mine, uncle!"

"Yours—how?"

"By a registered deed," he replied, and then proceeded to relate how the retention of this relic of the Druid days had been solemnly enjoined him by his father's dying request. "Do you remember, Uncle Lennard, that just before your disappearance, you carved your name upon it, where it can be distinctly seen to this day?"

"I do—I do remember—of a verity, truth is stranger than fiction!"

"By that act, fate would seem to have infeft you in the old estate," said Lennard, laughing.

The story of Dora's voyage with him, and their past intimacy was now more thoroughly gone into and explained; and when the elder Blair learned how Lennard had protected her on the island from the outrageous Trocadero, and much more than she, with all her confidence in her parent's love, dared to tell, but all of which José Saavedra, natheless his duplicity and grasping spirit, was afterwards compelled

to corroborate, he was filled with gratitude to this young kinsman, and with pity for his unmerited misfortunes.

The more he saw of his nephew, the more he loved him, and the same sentiment which inspired him, after so many years of absence and estrangement, to purchase back the old chateau and lands beside the Avon, led him to view with growing favour Lennard's regard for his cousin Dora; and he was never weary of hearing from him, as from a voice of the past, or from far away beyond the sea, accounts of the old place at home, of those who were still surviving there, and might still remember him.

When he looked at Lennard, the memory of his parents' faces and home and hearth—of Blairavon with all its associations, Oakwoodlee with its white gables and belt of Scottish pines, Craigellon with its loch, the Tor Hill and the Mains of Kaims, the church built by John of Strathbroc, and the older fane of Inchmachan, all came back like a flood upon his heart; the present fled—the past returned; and he would say, laughing,—

"By Jove, I'll Don-me no more; but, thank God, shall be once again John Lennard Blair in the dear old country."

He had not seen his elder brother Richard for thirty years, yet he could note, in Lennard's bearing, voice, and eyes, and in his use of many a familiar home-word, much that recalled this brother; for Lennard inherited many traits of his father in a remarkable degree, without his worst and weakest, his silly feudal pride and spendthrift extravagance.

Dora was *not* sent back to the Guadaloupe convent, somewhat to the indignation of her aunt, the Hermana Santa Teresa; and one day she and Lennard were left in perfect happiness by Uncle Lennard, saying with a kind and soft smile, when he surprised them together in a garden seat,—

"So, so, I see that you are fonder of each other than cousins need quite to be; but my one ewe lamb, as I call her—the last survivor of my little flock of three—cannot be taken from me, Lennard, either by you or any one else."

"No, dear papa," said Dora, "I shall stay with you ever and always—ever and always; but," she added, with *naïveté*, "may not Lennard stay with us, too?"

"Blairavon is mine, and Oakwoodlee also, and they shall be yours and Lennard's after I am gone. Till then, you shall live with me, and so, my darling girl shall be by my side till life ends, and that is all I care for now."

"Papa, papa!" cried Dora, as she sprang into his open arms and kissed him on both cheeks in a transport of tears.

"Dora, there is nothing in the world that I could do and would leave undone for your happiness," exclaimed John Blair in a flush of affection.

"Truly," thought Lennard in his heart, "but this is Utopia at last."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE reader may now foresee how our drama should end.

Knowing the lawlessness and the temperament of the half-Spanish, half-Indian people among whom he found himself—their fiery and impulsive, jealous and treacherous nature, Lennard Blair was not without occasional fears that Ignacio Saavedra or his uncle José might seek to get rid of him quietly; but time passed on, and he heard nothing of them.

The pronunciamento was daily expected to break forth in the city of Mexico, and in his heart Lennard blessed it, as the preparations for his marriage with Dora and for their departure were thus made without delay; and now they knew that, unless something most unforeseen intervened, they were to sail within a month by the first steam-liner for Liverpool *viâ* Kingston and Port-au-Prince.

Engaged people are usually so absorbed in themselves, as to be a bore to others and to be bored by them; so we have no intention of intruding on the drives, rides, and rambles of our lovers during the last month of their happy sojourn, in which day after day rolled fleetly past, and saw them losing their way, and forgetful of the world amid the orange-groves and wonderful gardens of the hacienda, in paths that were literally tunnels of purple, white, and crimson flowers—or in solitary places where a passing muleteer, or a half-clad Indian alone might pass to break the solitude; and from whence on one hand they might see the city of Vera Cruz with its spires and sixteen domes, the bay of Vergara opening into the Gulf of Mexico—that sea they were so soon again to travel together; and on the other, upheaved the eternal mountains crowned with snows—the granite summits of the Cordilleras of Anahuac that look down on the western plains and the city of Montezuma:

and then there were the evenings and the nights, when side by side, telling of their love, of their coming marriage and of their departure, of their long and glorious future—or when lost in happy reverie, hand in hand and half-embraced they sat on the terraces of the villa, while the air was laden with the perfume of that lovely region of flowers (where in the days of Cortez a bouquet was deemed the most valuable gift that could be given to an ambassador), and while the fire-flies flashed around them, the distant sea slept in the light of the silver moon, the blue vault above was gemmed with stars, and ever and anon the red volcanic gleams shot upward from the snow-clad summit of the Tuxtli.

They were left much to themselves, for the elder Blair—Don Juan, we had almost named him—spent most of his time in the city "winding up" his monetary affairs.

In romances we meet, and in real life we frequently hear, of couples that were made for each other—of matches that are made in heaven, and so forth—but Dora and Lennard Blair seemed as if their characters, tastes, tone and perceptions were identically formed together; as if *each* were the other's *half;* and then all the bars, hindrances, and annoyances which make up the usual "prologue to a love-match" had certainly not been wanting in their instance.

During their time of happy dreams, a European letter came to Lennard.

It was from his old friend, Frank Feverley, announcing that he had been married for some weeks to his early and only flame, Milly Montgomerie, the widowed Lady Wharton Foster (the pale little beauty with the quiet dark eyes)—married too, by old Dr. Magnus Kirkford; that he had relinquished practice, and, as her father was dead, had taken up his residence at Monkwood Moat, intending to devote himself to the education of her little son and to the life of a country gentleman.

"Ranald Cheyne, of the Haughs—that hearty old fox-hunter—has just heard of all that has come to pass with you," continued the Doctor; "and he looks forward with delight to the time when he shall plant his boot-tops under your mahogany and be again the guest of a Blair of Blair-avon—wherein, by the way, your uncle's agents here have duly installed Elsie and Steinie to set all things right for your home-coming. Cheyne's eldest daughter Flora has become Mrs. D. P. Dabchick (you remember the bumptious little barrister!) who has succeeded his friend Shoddy in a

sheriffship. He had a destiny as well as Œdipus, but it was a briefless one; however his long career of (perhaps) unscrupulous presswork in defence of his party has been rewarded at last, and he has got both a wife and a post far above his talents and origin."

All this sounded very like small gossip on that side of the Atlantic Ocean; but still it was a voice from home, and Lennard read over the letter more than once to his uncle.

In the little chapel of the hacienda, a fane situated in a spot where the pink and white hawthorn bushes and a grassy bank covered with yellow buttercups and white daisies reminded Lennard of his home, they were married by the chaplain of the Governor. The union of cousins is not permitted in Mexico without a license; but a certain number of doubloons had obtained that, and moreover, they were to reside far from the Tierra Caliente.

We need not expatiate on the beauty of the girlish bride, her diamonds, or on her wonderful lace dress which cost fifty dollars a *vara* (the Mexican yard), or how freely Lennard and his uncle scattered handfuls of gold as they came forth to the carriage, when the brown leperos ran hobbling after them in hideous crowds, shouting—

"Caridad señora y señores; Caridad, by the souls of your mothers—by the soul of her you love!" and the uptossed pistoles fell in sparkling showers through the sunny air.

The little padrino and his sullen nephew were not present, but no hearts were broken by their absence; the captain, Salvador Gonzalez y Llano, and a few select friends attended them, and Mencia waited on her mistress. There was no display, no marriage-feast, for they were soon to depart; and the red funnel of the very ship by which they were to sail was visible in the bright blue bay from the pointed windows of the chapel.

The previous order of destiny was now inverted, and it was on the *first* of May—on the very day when the dreaded Revolution broke forth, when the roses are over in the land of Montezuma and the waysides are bordered by giant dahlias and marigolds—that their vessel, a splendid Liverpool liner, steamed past the great façade and towering batteries of San Juan de Ulloa; and when Dora, once more in her little hat and veil, stood by Lennard's side, her hands clasped on his arm while taking a farewell look of picturesque Vera Cruz and the summit of Tuxtli.

The spirit of the elder Blair was a little depressed for a time, on seeing the land of his thirty years' prosperous

labour, and where the graves of his wife and children lay, fading astern ; but he said—

"All is ever for the best—though at times we do not think so. In all your mischances and misfortunes, Lennard, and in those of my earlier years, we must *now* recognize the great Guiding Hand that dispenses or brings to pass many a blessing we should never have known had our own selfish wills and narrow wishes had their way in the Battle of Life."

THE END.

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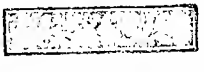

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